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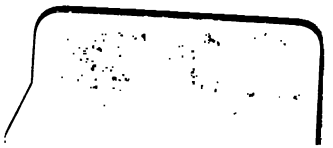

MANNA IN THE HOUSE:

OR,

DAILY EXPOSITIONS OF THE GOSPELS.

BY THE

REV. BARTON BOUCHIER, A.M.,

CURATE OF CHEAM, SURREY.

St. Matthew.

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PREFACE.

It is with no presumptuous purpose to depreciate or supersede the labours of others in the same field, that I am induced to publish the present Commentary on the Gospels. It might, indeed, be sufficient to say, that the mine, or the stream, or the mountain-side, or wherever the ore may be found, is ample enough to admit, and rich enough to reward, the labours of each that digs. But I would simply state my own feelings on the subject, and what it was which first led to the present work.

Having been, for many years, in the habit of reading expositions of Scripture in my domestic worship, I had soon exhausted the few volumes adapted for that purpose which I possessed, and was then induced to make trial of original exposition. Indeed, even at an earlier period, I had

often been forced to blend the two. So many circumstances arose amid the various exigencies and events of a somewhat large and promiscuous household, requiring, or at least seeming to call forth, a peculiar notice, either for warning or encouragement—to build up, or, it may have been, even to lay the foundation—that I had soon found that no Commentary, however ample or however excellent, could meet all the varying phases and requirements of an ever-changing family circle. I therefore had recourse at last to reliance on my own resources; and though, in many a particular, I could not but be conscious of the inferiority, yet, upon the whole, I found it more useful, and far more easy, in that way to give to each his due portion of meat in his season. I had in this way gone through the whole of the New Testament; and then, after some interval of other portions of Scripture, I again, a few months ago, resumed the Gospels. It then occurred to me to gather up, as it were, on the following morning, as accurately as I could remember, the crumbs I had scattered the preceding night. This I continued to do without any reference to or idea of publication, till they began to accumulate on my hands, and it then suggested itself to me, that that which I felt and

knew had, through the blessing of God, been useful to some, might, through the same blessing, be beneficial and acceptable to others.

I am, at the same time, quite aware, that neither this Commentary, nor, in fact, any, can supply the deficiencies I felt in my own household, and which each one, no doubt, equally feels in his. It is the same with prayer: no form of prayer, however excellent, can meet all the requirements of a family congregation. The want of to-day is perhaps supplied by the gift of to-morrow, and succeeded by another want of another character: the health of to-day may give way to the sickness of to-morrow, or the sickness be replaced by health; the departure of a member of the household on a journey may call for especial prayer for protection, or the return in safety for especial thanksgiving. The inadvertence or thoughtlessness of the younger, and the deliberate transgression of the older member, demand different language; and no source but the gushing out of the feeling from the heart at the moment of need, is adequate to supply all this. And yet there are so many wants in common, so many infirmities, trials, and afflictions shared alike, and "accomplished in our

brethren that are in the world," that there are but few forms in which we cannot find much adapted to our own case, and our own household. And so with regard to Expositions of Scripture, there are few which, if they simply and unreservedly set forth the truth as it is in Jesus, may not be used with benefit in every family circle. The present one puts forth no claims to originality of design or comment: it is literally the gathering up of what was actually delivered in a household, as far as memory could supply, with, of course, the necessary omission of merely personal or local observations. It is very possible that in the address of the moment, I may have adopted, unawares, the thoughts, or even the words, of a predecessor; and even where memory has consciously supplied a more powerful or happier expression than my own, I have not hesitated to appropriate it, though, of course, with acknowledgments of the debt.

Should it be found that the present volumes are an acceptable addition to the household requirements of family devotion, they will be followed by the remaining Gospels. In committing the present portion to the press, I commend it, in earnest prayer, to the great Head of

the Church; and, in the words of a holy man of old, I would say, "Domine Deus, quæcunque dixi de tuo, agnoscant et tui; si qua de meo, et tu ignosce et tui."*

* August. De Trin.

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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW.

SECTION I.

THE very first word of the New Testament is a word of blessedness, and a message of good-will, love, and peace. The word "gospel," both in its original Greek and our own Saxon-English, alike signifies "good tidings." And, assuredly, there can be no better tidings to *sinful* man than that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." There can be no better tidings to *lost* man than that "Jesus Christ came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost." And to whom are these good tidings, this gospel, preached? Our Lord himself tells us, that there is no limitation of clime or country, no selection of class or colour—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;" or if, indeed, a selection is made of those to whom it is more especially addressed, and to whom it would be more especially endeared, "to *the poor* the gospel is preached;"—not the poor in this world's goods only, but those who are really

and spiritually poor, and naked, and miserable, and blind; who know their own poverty, and shiver beneath their nakedness, and are groping for a way of safety in the midst of their blindness,—to them are proclaimed and offered the unsearchable riches of Christ, the robe of Christ's own righteousness, and that enlightening of the eyes which can enable them to discern spiritual things. And how wonderful are these tidings! They never impair by age; they never lessen by repetition. They were good tidings when the angels proclaimed them on the plains of Bethlehem nearly two thousand years ago. They have been good tidings to the countless thousands who have heard and received them ever since; and the tidings are as fresh and consolatory to ourselves to-night as they were generations ago. I would only say, be careful that you receive them as such. They have a twofold character—they must be either a savour of life unto life, or a savour of death unto death. In rejecting these tidings, you reject the only way of salvation, for "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we can be saved," but only the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And remember the solemn question of the apostle, "How can we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

SECTION II.

(Chapter i. verses 1—17.)

THE first seventeen verses of this Gospel seem only to contain an uninteresting and unimportant catalogue of names,—some, such as Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and David, and a few others, well known and endeared to us by the records left of them in the Holy Scriptures; but the majority of them are unknown, and not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. This catalogue is called in the first verse, "The book of the generations of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham"—the record of those ancestors according to the flesh from whom the Saviour of the world descended, and tracing his earthly lineage through the line of Joseph his reputed father. It is no vainglorious record of earthly ancestry. *Man* loves to rake up the musty annals of his race, and to trace his descent through a long line of illustrious forefathers; but though this list of the human ancestors of Jesus records the names of the various monarchs that sat on the throne of Judah, of what added glory can it be to Him who is Lord of lords, and King of kings? The purpose of this genealogy is of far more importance than simply to record the lineage of the son of David. Its end is to prove, that the Lord Jesus Christ was the son of David and the son of Abra-

ham, and therefore of that family and tribe and nation from whom the Messiah was to spring. The promise of the *blessing* was made to Abraham and his seed; the promise of the *dominion* was made to David and his seed. "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," was the promise to Abraham. "I have made a covenant with my chosen. I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations," was the promise to David. Unless, therefore, Jesus, according to the flesh, be the son of Abraham, he is not the blessing, and the blessed One, promised to Abraham; unless, too, Jesus be the son of David, he is not the promised inheritor of his throne, the Saviour of the world. It was to establish these facts that this genealogy is here recorded; and at the period when St. Matthew wrote his Gospel, these pedigrees were most carefully preserved, and every Jew might for himself have ascertained that Jesus Christ was indeed the son of David and the son of Abraham. And it is one of the arguments that might be used to a Jew at the present day, who is looking for a Saviour *yet to come*, that he has no records left, no genealogies extant, by which he could trace the Saviour's line to David or to Abraham. There is not a Jew on all the earth who can tell from what tribe or family he is descended: none assuredly could prove that he is descended from Aaron or from David; and therefore both the priestly and

the kingly office must be for ever at an end, or in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do not, then, say or think that any portion of the Holy Scriptures which the Holy Ghost has indited for our instruction is valueless, or that this is simply a tedious transcript of names, which may be skipped over and left unread. You see that it holds a most important place at the very threshold of the gospel; and independent of this, there is something serious and solemn in reading even the names of those who have once played their allotted part in life, and who have long since gone before God in judgment. It is a common remark, that they are all dead; but it is not so. Though their bodies have long since crumbled into dust, their spirits are even now alive—are living either in the presence of God, or, cast out from his presence, are awaiting the solemn day of account; and it ought to be our earnest desire, our continual prayer, that we may be of the number of those who shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

SECTION III.

(Chapter i. verse 18 to the end.)

THE first point that is most prominently brought before us here, is the name of that holy child which was thus miraculously conceived

and brought forth of the blessed Virgin. That name is Jesus, the most precious in all the nomenclature of the Bible.

"How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!"

It is the same name as Joshua, in the Old Testament; and the meaning of the name is a "Saviour." As was said by the angel, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: *for* he shall save his people *from* their sins." There are other names given to Jesus: *Emmanuel*—"God with us;" *Christ*, the "Anointed" One, from which the name of *Christians* is derived; and *Messiah*, the Sent or Messenger of the Covenant,—all full of sweetness and comfort, but none so sweet as Jesus to the believer's heart and ear. But it is not so much the name, as the purport and meaning of the name, in which we are interested. Jesus is a Saviour, the promised, predicted Saviour; but there are no better words to describe his errand of love and mercy to a sinful world than those which the angel of the Lord here employs to Joseph, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: *because* he shall save his people *from* their sins." Take notice of the expression, for it is a very remarkable one, and not only contains a promise of the highest importance and consolation, but it affords, at the same time, a test or proof to ourselves whether we are of the Lord's people. "He shall save *his people*." Alas! they

are not all Israel who are of Israel; nor are all that name the name of Christ, His people. "Let every one," saith the apostle, "that nameth the name of Christ depart from all iniquity;" and we are here told, that the salvation which Jesus came to bring, was a salvation from sin—from its power, its pollution, its dominion, and its bondage. It were no salvation to be saved, if it were possible, *in* our sins, to be left still exposed to their tyranny and corruption, and their hard slavery. Far more, far beyond this, was the salvation purchased by the blood of Jesus. He "came to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works," and abounding in all the fruits of grace and holiness. It is true, sin will strive against us, to cast us down and destroy us; but the promise is, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." It may harass, and wound, and sore disquiet you; but it shall be sin prayed against, sin resisted, sin weakened, and sin loosening its hold upon you, till that blessed moment when the Saviour's voice shall call his people to that home where no sin can enter, and where, as the emancipated spirit passes the threshold, it is welcomed with the joyous assurance, "Come, and sin no more." The test, then, to us is, Are we hating sin? Are we seeking, praying to be delivered *from* it; from its burden and its pollution; groaning beneath its weight, and loathing its impurity? Or are we calm and indifferent, and though, it may be, using the words for deliverance,

yet heedless of their meaning, and insensible of the mighty promise given to us in the name of the blessed Jesus?

SECTION IV.

(Chapter ii. verses 1—13.)

It is not without an especial meaning that it is here said that Jesus was born "in the days of Herod the king." It had been foretold by the aged Jacob, when pronouncing the future destinies of his descendants, that the sceptre should not depart from Judah till Shiloh—*i. e.* the Messiah—came. Now Herod, though king of Judæa, was an Edomite by birth, and had been imposed by the Roman power on the Jewish people as their sovereign; and therefore the sceptre of their native monarchs had departed from Judah, and they were now a subjugated and tributary people, in the very condition and the very circumstances in which it was declared that Shiloh should come, or Jesus should be born.

The first event recorded by St. Matthew is the visit of the wise men to the infant Saviour. Other circumstances had occurred, which are recorded by St. Luke, but the present Gospel hastens at once to this visit of the wise men of the east, intimating thus early the flocking in of the Gentiles into the new covenant. They are called wise men, not perhaps so much from any

superior wisdom, but because they had made the abstruser parts of science their study, and had devoted their time and attention to the stars—to the interpretation of dreams and visions—and were in their own countries supposed to be interpreters of the will of God. They were of the same class and rank as those wise men whom Pharaoh sent for to expound his dreams, and they could not; and those whom Nebuchadnezzar employed for the same purpose, and with the same effect. These men, engaged, it may be, in studying the stars, had observed a luminous appearance in the heavens, which struck their attention and excited their inquiries, and which probably recalled to mind the prediction of Balaam, "There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel;" and they instantly set forth on a long and perilous journey to seek the King and the God whom they supposed the star to designate, in order that they might pay him adoration and homage.

They were no doubt learned in all the wisdom of their age and country, wise beyond the generality of those around them, and yet, at the first intimation of what they believed to be a revelation from Heaven, they became as little children, and sought to know the mind of the Lord in this matter. There is no doubt that they were most sincere in their inquiries, for they never hesitated a moment at difficulty or danger: they did not perplex themselves with how they should

find their way, or what reception they should meet with in such vague and questionable inquiries, but set out at once from their own distant land, with the one simple but earnest inquiry, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" not, *Is there one* born King of the Jews? for we have seen *a* star that seems to portend some great potentate and prince, and we have come to make inquiries; but, "Where is he that *is born King* of the Jews? for we have seen *his* star in the east, *and are come to worship him.*" And were they left to their own unguided efforts? Did the Lord vouchsafe no clue to guide, no light to cheer, no directions to aid them? He guided them all the way they should go: "he led them forth by the right way;" and the star they had seen in the east again guided them to the very house where the infant Jesus lay. And did their faith fail them? did they stagger through unbelief when they saw the King they came to worship, and the God whom they sought to adore, lying before them in all the feebleness of infancy, and all the meanness of poverty? No; it is said that as soon as they saw the young child with Mary his mother, "they fell down and worshipped him." If that Saviour, whom they then worshipped, afterwards declared that the Queen of Sheba should rise up in judgment with the men of that generation, and condemn them, for that she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and,

behold, a greater than Solomon was there, surely these wise men of the east will rise up against us, and condemn us, if *they* sought, and recognised, and worshipped a Saviour and a God in the lowly, unconscious Babe of Bethlehem, and *we* despise, and lightly esteem, and set at nought, a risen Saviour and an ascended God.

SECTION V.

(Chapter ii. verse 14 to the end.)

We have here the vain and futile effort of Herod to destroy the infant Saviour, and the cruel, though ineffectual, means he took to effect his purpose. It was, indeed, decreed in the everlasting counsels of Jehovah that the Son of God should die a bloody death,—that "by the hands of wicked and cruel men He should be crucified and slain;" but the time was not yet come; and till God's hour arrived, vain was the rage of man. In the language of the Psalmist, we might ask, "Why do the heathen so furiously rage together: and why do the people imagine a vain thing?" The kings of the earth *may* stand up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed,—but in vain. As Jesus, many a year afterwards, said of himself in reference to another Herod, "Mine hour is not yet come."

Herod was an old man, and personally could

have nothing to dread from the pretensions of one who was still an infant; nor had he shown that affection for his children as to be much influenced by regard for them. In fact, he had been so cruel towards them, and had put so many of his own sons to death, that the Roman Emperor had sarcastically observed of him, "I had rather be Herod's swine than his son,"—in allusion to the prohibition of swine's flesh in the Jewish law. No doubt Herod's vindictive pride had been touched to the quick when he saw that he had been "mocked by the wise men," and that his intended prey had escaped his clutches. But besides this, Herod, though a Jewish monarch, was an Edomite by birth; and an Edomite never forgot his enmity to the Jewish race. It was Doeg, an Edomite, who, in the time of David, slew all the priests of the house of Eli, at the bidding of Saul; and in the 137th Psalm the Psalmist is introduced as saying, "Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it even to the foundation thereof." And now another Edomite, in the person of Herod, wreaks his bloody enmity against the hated race; and in his mad infatuation thinks to counteract the purposes and falsify the prophecies of God. But in vain;—the timely warning is given to Joseph in a dream, and Egypt is marked out as the place of refuge for the child. How singular this appointment! Egypt had once before been sought as a place of

refuge for the children of Israel; but it had been the scene of as great and similar a cruelty towards them as was now about to be practised in Bethlehem. A cruel monarch had once made Egypt the scene of massacre to all the male children of the Hebrews; even so early, as afterwards in Ramah, did Rachel weep for her children. And now Egypt is to be the refuge for an Hebrew child from a similar slaughter in Judæa.

It was an early baptism into the Christian Church, of these Innocents—they were baptized in their own blood; but the day of their baptism was the day of their triumphant passage into heaven, and by their blood was the seed of the Church watered. They were in very truth the first-fruits unto God and the Lamb, shedding, though unconsciously, their blood in the cause of their new-born Saviour; and we are taught in the Collect appointed by the Church to commemorate this event, to pray for ourselves, that, by the innocency of our lives, and the constancy of our faith even unto death, we too, with them, may glorify God's holy name.

SECTION VI.

(Chapter iii. verses 1—13.)

A LONG period of more than 400 years had elapsed since the last of the prophets, Malachi,

had appeared, and he had closed the sacred series by a prediction of the very event with which this chapter commences: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." There is but a page, as it were, between the prediction and the fulfilment, in the Bible; and yet, from Malachi till John, for more than four centuries, there had been no prophet in Israel. And it would appear that little, if any, alteration for the better had taken place in the Jewish character during that long interval: the stern and indignant denunciations of the Baptist seem but a continuation of the severe rebukes of the prophet. In fact, the people were only filling up the measure of their iniquities, like the Amorites of old; and the last dispensation of mercy was now about to dawn upon them, and be equally unheeded with all preceding ones.

Isaiah, as well as Malachi, had predicted the coming of this forerunner of the Saviour, and there had been nearly the same interval between the two as there was between the latter and its fulfilment. With the Lord a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years but as a day.

Nothing is recorded by St. Matthew of the early history of John; and, in fact, like his great predecessor Elijah, he is brought, as it were,

abruptly before us in this Gospel, and is introduced as at once denouncing God's wrath on the offending people of Israel. As Elijah, on *his* first appearance, said unto Ahab, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word,"—so here John is introduced as saying, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The axe is laid unto the root of the tree, and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." We may indeed say that John himself was laying the axe to the root of the evil when he warned them not to rest in their fancied privileges as children of Abraham. It was the very boast which they did actually make to Jesus afterwards, "We be Abraham's seed," and could not be brought to understand how one of God's chosen race, one of that very people in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed, should himself be a castaway; or that because they were the seed of Abraham, it did not necessarily follow that they were all children. It was, no doubt, an unwelcome doctrine to the proud Pharisee, the sceptic Sadducee, and the sensual Herodian; and accordingly we find, that though many came to his preaching, and were even baptized of him, few adhered to him. They were resting in these their fancied privileges, as children of Abraham, as the chosen people of God; as if outward enrolment among the people of Israel constituted a

true Israelite. And are not too many among ourselves resting on the same supposed distinctions? Are not some among us hoping, if not actually believing, that our admission into the Christian Church by baptism is a valid title to the name of a Christian, or the privileges of a disciple? There can be to us only the same test as John proposed to those who flocked to him, "Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance"—fruits worthy of our Christian calling, springing from a Christian source—the love of God, and tending to a Christian end—the love and good of our neighbour. In the words of the apostle, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

SECTION VII.

(Chapter iii. verse 14 to the end.)

It was an act of gracious humility on the part of our Lord, that he condescended to the ordinance of baptism for our sakes, and to set us an example in his own practice of perfect obedience to the will and law of God. He had already submitted to the painful and bloody rite of circumcision; but as that might perhaps be said to have been an unconscious act of obedience, as he was then but an infant of eight days old, so now, in his maturer years, of his own accord, he presents himself before John to receive the waters

of baptism at his hand. As in the last scene of his life, when the soldier pierced his heart with a spear, forthwith came thereout blood and water, so, ere he commenced his ministry, blood and water were significantly employed to inaugurate his introduction both into life and to his ministry —most significant to us of the great blessings which believers were to partake of through him— blood for remission, water for regeneration; blood for atonement, water for purification. It was not, however, for his own sin. Jesus was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, and needed no washing away of sin for himself; and it was for this reason that the Baptist, though declared to be the greatest of those born of women, yet, as himself a sinner, at first would have declined the office, and sought to be baptized of the Saviour; and when at last he yielded to the Saviour's plea, that "thus it became him to fulfil all righteousness," we observe at once the difference. The other baptized ones stayed to confess their sins; Jesus, as having no sins to confess, went up straightway out of the water. We must be careful, however, not to confound this baptism of John's with the ordinance of Christian baptism. That was not yet instituted, nor its form authorized. Nor was the Jewish baptism, like the Christian's, the rite of initiation into the Jewish covenant. Circumcision was to the Jew what baptism is to the Christian; and yet the baptism of John had

much that resembled ours; for it was to the sincere recipient, accompanied as it was with a confession of his sins, a token of his sincere desire to be washed and cleansed from them, as well as a pledge and token of their being forgiven by God.

And now, to proclaim with all fitting solemnity the Saviour's inauguration to his office and public ministry, the banks of Jordan were witness to the most signal display of glory. As in the beginning of the old world, the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, to reduce chaos into order, so, in the beginning of the new, the Spirit of God again descended, and rested on the head of the Eternal Son. The appearance was no appearance of terror,—it came in no resemblance of a desolating or avenging being; but its emblem was the lowly and the loving dove; and so, we are told, the fruits of the Spirit are "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, and meekness;" and to crown this glorious display, a voice out of heaven, from the Eternal Father himself, proclaims him as "his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased." Thus, on these banks of Jordan, at the baptism of Christ, was this glorious manifestation of the Three Persons of the ever-blessed Trinity,—the Eternal Spirit descending on the Eternal Son, and the Everlasting Father, out of heaven, proclaiming him as his own beloved. So truly may we say, that as Jordan was the inlet of the wandering Israelites to their promised rest,

so, in this later annunciation of rest and redemption to their erring children, on the banks of the same Jordan was the first more open revelation made of that inscrutable mystery which we Christians adore,—one God, yet Three Persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. And is not the same tie existing between us and our God? "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God;" and through Christ "we have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." When Christ arose from the grave, before his ascension, he said to Mary Magdalene, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." His Father, then, is our Father; his God, our God. "Seeing, then, that we have this hope in us, let us purify ourselves, even as he is pure."

SECTION VIII.

(Chapter iv. verses 1—12.)

At the close of the last chapter we left Jesus on the banks of Jordan, when the Spirit of God had rested upon him as a dove, and the voice from out of heaven proclaimed him God's beloved Son. And what was the first act of this Holy Spirit? What was the path in which He led Jesus first to walk? What was the first lesson taught by the Spirit? We are told in the first

verse of this chapter, "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." It was to a wilderness his steps were first directed; it was a path of trial he had first to tread, a spiritual conflict in which he had to engage. The season of his greatest earthly glory was succeeded by a season of peculiar destitution, weariness, and hunger. And so it often is. The hour of Israel's deliverance from bondage was the hour of *their* departure for the wilderness. And when St. Paul told the Corinthians of his having been caught up into Paradise, and there heard unspeakable words, which it was not lawful for man to utter, he immediately subjoins: "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet me." But what was needful for Paul could not be needful for the blessed Jesus. Why then was he thus tempted and tried? why was he left exposed to hunger in the wilderness, and to be assaulted with the fiercest artillery of Satan? It behoved him to be made like unto his brethren. It was the compassionate tenderness of his loving heart, that we might have as our High Priest one who could be touched with a feeling of all our infirmities, and enter into all our burdens, and weaknesses, and weariness, seeing that he too was tempted like as we are. Jesus was not only the representative, but the champion of our race;

and went, like his earthly ancestor David, singly against his giant foe, and, like him, armed wit the simplest weapons of warfare. It was, too, to show to many a burdened and afflicted spirit, sinking under the pressure of similar trials, that temptations, in themselves, are not sins, or else Jesus had never suffered them. They are trials and afflictions indeed, and sore burdens to a wounded spirit, but they are not sins till yielded to. Nor are they evidences of God's desertion, or withdrawal of his favour from us; and he often permits his dearest children to be thus tried, to manifest more strongly his grace in them, and his power to rescue. It was Paul, just favoured with the highest token of his love, that he permitted the messenger of Satan to buffet; and it was Jesus, whom he had just proclaimed his beloved Son, that his Spirit now leads into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

And what is the great lesson of encouragement in *our* conflicts with the same foe? It is that which St. Peter has embodied in the form of a precept, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." But Jesus perhaps may have had weapons of far more mighty power than any we have to wield. He may have said, "Get thee behind me, Satan; for I am thy Creator, thy God, and thy Judge." He may have smitten him to the earth with the word of his power, and consumed him with the breath of his displeasure. No! the same weapon that Jesus wielded, we may wield also.

It is put into our hands, and it has lost none of its ethereal temper since the days of Jesus' conflict. It is still mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. It still retains its name—"the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Go forth, then, with the Bible in your hands and hearts; have its promises, its precepts, and its threatenings written out in your hearts by the Spirit; have a text for every trial, a promise for every care, a precept for every peril; and Satan will no more prevail against you than he did against Jesus.

SECTION IX.

(Chapter iv. verses 13—18.)

You may remember that when John's disciples, with a very pardonable jealousy for their master's honour, reported to him the preaching of Jesus, and how all men flocked to him, John, with characteristic humility, replied, "He must increase, but I must decrease." And so here we find that very shortly after our Lord's entrance on his public ministry, "John was cast into prison." The work of the Saviour was now to begin; the mission of his forerunner, therefore, was at an end. St. Matthew omits many of the earlier circumstances of Christ's ministry, and at once introduces him as preaching in Galilee, and taking up his stated residence in Capernaum, at

that time a place of great resort, and situated on the sea of Tiberias, or Galilee; or, as it is also called, the lake of Gennesareth. We might, perhaps, wonder why Nazareth should have been left by Jesus. It was the home of his earthly parents; it had been the residence of his own boyhood and youth; and there is all probability he had for a time followed his father's lowly occupation of a carpenter; but though St. Matthew only incidentally remarks, that "leaving Nazareth, he dwelt at Capernaum," we find from the other Evangelists that he did commence his ministry in that town, but that they rejected his message, and would have thrown him from the brow of the hill on which their city was built. They therefore rejected him, and he, in righteous retribution, rejected them, and removed to Capernaum; and St. Matthew records a prophecy of Isaiah as fulfilled in this residence of our Lord in the districts of Galilee. That glorious privilege, which was now vouchsafed to the inhabitants of this country, is described as light breaking forth in the midst of darkness. They were in darkness, in gross darkness—"*sitting*" in darkness—making no effort to remove, or get away from it; contentedly sitting quiet, even in the midst of darkness, as was said, "My people love to have it so." It was a sad condition in which the people of Egypt were, when there was darkness over all the land—darkness that might be felt—when they saw not one another, neither

rose any from his place, for three days. But it was a far sadder condition in which these people of Galilee were sitting, though they felt it not. They loved the darkness, and chose it in preference to the light. With what joy, we might have thought, would Capernaum, and the other cities and villages of Galilee, have hailed the first breaking, in the horizon, of that glorious brightness—the first arising and dawn of the Sun of Righteousness over their land! But, alas! they valued nôt their privileges, and their condition was therefore the more sad and the more fearful, because, in the midst of light, they still chose the darkness. We know that the light did not avail them, for our Lord himself afterwards, with melancholy recapitulation, denounces on all these cities of Galilee a sadder doom than on Tyre or Sidon, on Sodom or Gomorrah. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida!" "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell." It is indeed a sad thing to slight privileges. But we are sitting even in the midst of greater light —more effulgent brilliance, than either Chorazin or Bethsaida, or even Capernaum. They saw, it is true, Jesus walking among them; they witnessed his miracles; they heard his words; but he was still a man of sorrows, a man of poverty, and of mean condition; and they had besides a far thicker wall of Jewish prejudice to break through than we in Christian lands can under-

stand. But we know, and believe, and confess that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God. His Word is brought nigh unto us; it is line upon line, and precept upon precept: no chain, no clasp is on our Protestant Bibles; and we may read, and judge, and meditate for ourselves. Is the light, then, merely shining *around* us, or is it shining *in our own hearts?* Is it with us, as with Gideon's fleece, when it was dry upon the fleece only, though there was dew on all the ground? Remember, and lay to heart, the apostle's solemn question, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

SECTION X.

(Chapter iv. verse 19 to the end.)

No sooner did Jesus commence his ministry than he sought for those who were to be his chosen followers, and hereafter the witnesses of his life and doctrine. And St. Matthew here records the calling of four of those who were the immediate attendants on his person, and the selected depositaries of his revealed truths,—Andrew and his brother Peter, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee. It is remarkable among what class, and in what station, he sought and found them. It was not when he was at Jerusalem, among the chief priests and scribes, the expounders of the law, and those who sat in

Moses' seat—men whose previous knowledge, and learning, and education, might have recommended them for the work. Nor did he go to the court of Herod, or among the great and noble of the land, whose influence, and rank, and wealth, might have smoothed many a difficulty, and disarmed many a sneer. He sought neither friend nor patron among such; but he goes to the side of the sea of Galilee, and there, on its shores, he finds men engaged in the lowly occupation of fishermen, and he calls them with the single words, "Follow me;" while the only lure, the only promise held out, was the apparently vague and ambiguous declaration, "And I will make you fishers of men." It may be said that the arrogant Pharisee, and the sceptic Sadducee, and the worldly Herodian, would alike have disregarded his call. No doubt they would; but was there, in itself, any more powerful attraction in the words of Jesus, "Follow me," to these unlettered fishermen, to induce them to forsake father and friends and all, to follow a despised Master? was there anything, in itself, in the reward held out, "I will make you fishers of men," to lead them to throw up their boats, and nets, and implements of trade, and forsake all to follow Jesus? No! the call, and the promise, and the offer, would have been as ineffectual to the fishermen of Tiberias, as to Annas, or Caiaphas, or Herod, or the Roman governor himself, had not power from on high accompanied

his words; and the same power that rendered the call effectual to them might and would have rendered it equally effectual with the others. Why, then, did Jesus select his followers and witnesses from the lowlier and less-esteemed ranks of life? St. Paul gives us the reason: that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men; and that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." But it was not to Andrew and Peter, and James and John alone, that the call of the Saviour was addressed. It is addressed to you and to me, and to every one. "Follow me," was the badge of our profession when we were first given to Christ in our baptism. "Follow me," has been the theme of every lesson, of every invitation, ever since. All alike hear the words—all alike profess obedience: "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." But is there not with too many something of the reservation which characterized one whom Jesus called in the same words, "Follow me"?—"Suffer me first to go and bury my father." "Suffer me first

to indulge my natural desires, to enjoy my youth, or to lay up a larger store for age, and then I will follow thee." But there must be no reservation; and where power accompanies the call, there will be none—no human ties, no earthly idols—all in subservience to the one paramount duty and privilege of following the Lord fully—of following the Lamb *whithersoever* he goeth, whether it be through trial or persecution, or even unto death. "I *will* follow thee whithersoever thou goest." Lord, make thine own call effectual in *our* hearts, that we may be "thy people, willing in the day of thy power."

SECTION XI.

(Chapter v. verses 1—13.)

We have in this and the two following chapters what is called our Lord's "Sermon on the Mount." It is the first Christian sermon on record; and when we consider who the preacher was, that it fell from the lips of Him who spake as never man spake, we may well conclude that it contains a storehouse and a treasury of spiritual wisdom and instruction. The first twelve verses which I have read are called the Beatitudes, or Blessings, because each verse begins with the word "Blessed," and describes the character of those who are really and truly blessed. The word, however, would be more correctly rendered "Happy;"

and, in fact, these first verses may be called "A Definition of Human Happiness." Many have written and taught upon the same subject, and Solomon has left us a book in which he professes to discuss the different pursuits after human happiness; but he records rather its disappointments and its failures, and sums up all earthly enjoyment in the sad acknowledgment that it is but "vanity and vexation of spirit." Let us then see what He who came from heaven to teach us, and who taught with power and as one having authority, and not as the scribes, has said on the subject, and whom He has delineated as the truly happy. How sweetly blended with the purest love and the tenderest yearnings for our good are these words of our Lord! how characteristic of Him who was full of grace and truth, and of that gospel he came to deliver! The law had been delivered on Mount Sinai with its appropriate accompaniments of "blackness, and darkness, and tempest," amid thunders and lightnings so fearful, that the children of Israel stood afar off; and even Moses, their mediator, himself quaked exceedingly; but now the people pressed around Him, while Jesus, as a father instructing his children, sat in the midst and taught them. But how different the truths which proceeded from his lips to that doctrine which they had been taught by those who sat in Moses' seat, or to what they no doubt expected him to deliver. They were looking for an earthly deli-

verer—they were expecting one who was to "restore the kingdom to Israel," and anticipation had already fixed on Jesus as "he that should redeem Israel." With what eagerness, then, may we imagine them hanging on the lips of Jesus, and ready to catch the first accents that fell from him as the harbinger of deliverance, and victory, and triumph! and we may imagine, too, something of the disappointment, and the downfall of hopes so excited, with which no doubt many, and the sneer and the scorn with which some, would listen to a precept, not only so subversive of every anticipation, but so contrary to every maxim of the world and of experience: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." They, too, desired a kingdom, but it was a kingdom on earth; and they cared not for the reversion of one, if it was to be attained by such self-denying paths as poverty of spirit. There were, however, no doubt, some amid those multitudes on whose hearts such gracious words must have descended as the dew upon the mown grass, and who were ready to respond in the Psalmist's words, "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips." And, assuredly, never from the lips of mortal man descended such golden rules as are here embodied in these first few verses of the fifth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel. Read them over and over again—ponder them deeply in your hearts—pray over them; pray that a fair and

unsullied transcript of them may be made in your own life and conversation, and that thus it may be noted of you, as was noted of his apostles afterwards, that you have indeed been with Jesus, and have learnt of him.

SECTION XII.

(Chapter v. verses 14—21.)

It is a very striking and appropriate metaphor which our Lord here makes use of in reference to his disciples, and Christians in general, that they are the salt of the earth. It is the property of salt, we know, to preserve that which is corruptible from corruption, and that which is liable to dissolution, from decay. The whole world lieth in wickedness, and is full of corruption, and if left to its own unhindered progress, it would soon perish. The sins and wickedness of the larger portion of mankind would soon hasten its decay and ruin; but good men, men of piety and prayer, men of active charity to their fellow-creatures, and of fervent intercession with their God, scattered here and there, "one of a family and two of a city," are as an handful of salt to season and preserve: and for their sakes many and many a family and place and nation is spared, which would otherwise be doomed to righteous retribution. Thus the Lord said to Abraham, when pleading for Sodom, "If there be found ten

righteous within the city, I will not destroy the city for ten's sake;" and even when that scanty number was not found, and the city was left to its doom, even then the Lord avowed that he could do nothing till righteous Lot was delivered out of the place. And in the parable of the tares, they are spared, lest in rooting them up, the wheat also be rooted up with them;—lest in the punishment of the one, the interests of the other should be involved. But this is not the only way in which God's people are as salt of the earth: there is a far more beneficial influence exerted by them than even their fervent intercession with the Almighty to spare. It is their example, the example of their lives and conversation acting on an ungodly world; and here, perhaps, the other metaphor applied by our Lord, as the light of the world, may more appropriately be adopted; but whether as salt to season and give savour, or as light to lighten, in either metaphor there is the greatest encouragement to ourselves. Our sphere may be a very lowly one, and in our own estimation we may think that we have no power to do good to others. But there is no situation so lowly, no station so humble, no sphere so limited, but a child of God may, and does, in a variety of ways unknown even to himself, effect an incalculable and never-ending amount of good. How often, for instance, has a Sunday-school child taken home, perhaps to an ungodly home, some text of Scripture, or some remark of the

teacher, and, like the melting, penetrating salt, it has reached the heart of a godless father or a careless mother; or, like the light, spread and diffuse itself through the various members of the household,—like the leaven in the parable, which the woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. How often has the mere presence of one of God's people, known and commended as such, rebuked and restrained an ungodly company! And how often, too, has the presence of such a one, like Elisha in the Shunammite's house, brought a host of blessings in its train! Surely, then, we ought never to think any sphere too limited or too lowly for the Lord's work: there is encouragement to the humblest and the poorest; and even of the very youngest it has been said, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained praise:" and our Lord here says to those who were of no higher station than fishermen on the sea of Galilee, "Ye are the salt of the earth." It is, however, blended with a seasonable caution, not only that it lose not its savour, but that its work be not superficial. The scribes and Pharisees professed much, and were much observed of men, and outwardly they assumed to be almost the only righteous:—"God, I thank thee that I am not as other men;"—and yet it is a solemn warning which our Saviour gives, that unless our righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees,

we shall, in no case, enter into the kingdom of heaven.

SECTION XIII.

(Chapter v. verses 21—32.)

OUR Lord here gives *His* exposition of some of the commandments of the Decalogue, and strange indeed must that exposition have sounded in the ears of those who had been trained up and accustomed only to the corrupt and partial glosses of their Jewish teachers. He commences with the sixth commandment, the first of the second table, which teaches us our duty towards our neighbour. "Thou shalt not kill," is its brief and simple prohibition, and the Jews confined it solely to the actual crime of murder. Cain was no doubt a murderer in the Jewish sense of the law. But had he stopped short of actual death, or had his brother Abel, though left for dead, been unexpectedly restored to life, Cain would have been no murderer. One sees at once, even by natural reason, how unsound and defective was such an exposition of the law, and that the man who committed violence with an intent to murder, though the act was not completed, was as guilty of the crime as if he had effected his purpose; as the man who went out to commit a theft, and was disturbed in his purpose, was equally a thief, though he carried nothing away with him. But

was it simply to enunciate this that Jesus delivered his exposition of the commandment? was this *His* measurement of the length and breadth of the law? David had long before said of God's law, "Thy commandment is exceeding *broad*," and he had also said, "The law of the Lord is *perfect*;" and St. Paul after him had said, "We know that the law is *spiritual*;" and it is this threefold character of the law which our Lord in this portion of the chapter unfolds. The law is "broad," or extensive, inasmuch as where a duty is commanded, it extends to and prohibits the contrary sin, and where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded; so again, when any duty is commanded, everything that may lead and tend to the fulfilment of that commandment, everything that may promote its facility and further its practice, is commanded also; and so also when any sin is forbidden, every avenue to that sin, every path that leads to it, every inlet that may give access to it, is as strictly forbidden also, in the breadth of God's commandment. The "*perfection*," too, of the law of the Lord is comprised in this, that it binds every one to the full conformity of the whole man unto righteousness, that *every* thought be brought into captivity to the obedience that is in Christ—that it requires entire obedience, demanding the utmost perfection in every duty, and forbidding the slightest deviation into sin—and this for ever. Again, the law is "spiritual," because it reaches to the very

thoughts and intents, the wishes and desires, of the heart—it takes cognizance not only of the outward act, but of the inward and hidden purpose—it forbids not only the commission, but the conceiving of lust in the heart. "The rays of this sun enter the most secret chambers of the heart." Let us just exemplify this with regard to the sixth commandment. The actual violence, the deed of outrage, is no doubt forbidden. But does our Lord stop there? No! every avenue to unkindness in our hearts towards a brother is ordered to be closed up; all causeless anger is prohibited; and even if a righteous anger be provoked, we are elsewhere cautioned against extending it too far: "Be ye angry," if it must needs be, *but* "sin not." Nor must we let it linger and rankle in our hearts: "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Nor is this the only door that must be guarded. Set a watch upon the door of your lips: angry words lead to revilings, and revilings are hurried on to that bitter abuse, and those fearful imprecations, which so often degrade and brutalize the quarrelsome and malignant. Every thought of unkindness, every feeling that would lead you to look askance on a brother, must be crushed: it was a spirit of envy that was the first germ of the first murder that stained the earth; and if no feeling of unkindness is to be allowed, every feeling of kindness, of love, and of good-will is to be cherished; for, as one apostle tells us, "Whoso hateth his brother is a murderer;" so another

apostle adds—"Owe no man anything, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law;"—and, "Love is the fulfilling of the law."

SECTION XIV.

(Chapter v. verse 33 to the end.)

THERE is much in these precepts of our Lord that can hardly be understood literally, any more than in the precept which we before read—"If thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut it off; or if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." It is nowhere required that a man should mutilate himself to prevent sin, or to punish himself for it when committed; and if a man, by way of penance or precaution, were to do so, he would in reality do that which was in itself sinful. The maceration of the human frame, as practised and encouraged, or at least applauded, in the Roman Catholic Church, is nearly akin to this, and is alluded to by the apostle, and condemned among those things which "have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body;" and, therefore, in that injunction in the 30th verse, as well as in those we have now read, we must look rather to the spirit of the precept, than to its literal meaning and purport. We are not, for instance, to give to every one that asketh, for if we did we should but encourage idleness and imposture, and soon

exhaust our means; nor, if a man by violence and wrong take from us our coat, are we to hand him our cloak also. The spirit which is inculcated in these and similar precepts is a spirit of love to man, flowing from love to God, and founded on a sense and knowledge of what we ourselves owe to His bounty and His forbearance. We are not to beggar ourselves, nor injure society, by indiscriminate almsgiving, but we are to encourage a spirit of self-denial and self-sacrifice in our own expenditure, and our own pleasures and personal gratifications, that we may have to give to them that need. Again, we are not to submit to violence and wrong to the injury of ourselves or family, or yield to reproaches and insinuations which would discredit our Christian character, and bring dishonour, through us, on God's holy name; but we are to repress every impulse of self-revenge, and to cherish that meekness of spirit and that Christian forbearance which would shrink from retaliation, or that Jewish practice and principle of "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." In a word, we should seek to imitate that character of unutterable goodness, which, though provoked every day, still causes its sun to shine, and its rains to fall, on the bad as well as the good, on the unjust as well as the just. It is no doubt a Christian grace of difficult attainment, but so is every conquest over self and selfish tempers. There may be wrongs most grievous to be borne, and nature may exclaim,

"Flesh and blood cannot bear this;" but remember, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Of far higher attainment in Christian progress and Christian grace was that poor negro slave in the West Indies of whom it is told, that, under some injustice and wrong—some torture too great for endurance—his only utterance, his only appeal, was, "I must tell this to my God." How entirely this is in the spirit of Him who said, "They are my adversaries, but I give myself unto prayer;" and how fully in accordance with the precept of the apostle, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord."

SECTION XV.

(Chapter vi. verses 1—4.)

Our Lord having in the preceding chapter vindicated the Law from the defective, partial comments which Jewish teachers had given to it, proceeds now to lay down some rules for our observance as regards our religious duties. *His* great end, and the great end of the gospel, is to teach men to look more to God and less to men in all they do; to be more anxious to secure the approval of God than the applause of the world. Our Lord here specifies three duties, almsgivings, prayer, and fasting; and it is worthy

of observation, that he does not lay down a command that we *do* give alms, or pray, or fast. He takes it for granted that all his disciples, every one according to his ability, will give alms, and every one will pray, and every one will practise, in proper season, the religious duty of fasting. He therefore only lays down rules how we are to perform these duties acceptably to God.

The great defect in almsgiving is ostentation, or, as it is here expressed, "sounding a trumpet before us," to let people and our neighbours know how charitable we are, or, rather, how much of our means we devote to this purpose. Of course, such a notion as this has no pretension to the name of charity, though it may be "almsgiving." The giver wants to purchase the applause and encomiums of the world, and he pays a certain price for it. It partakes, therefore, of the nature of a bargain, and a bargain of a most selfish character. I really, however, do not know a more difficult duty than that of almsgiving, or real, unfeigned charity. I really do not think there is any other duty of life so unconsciously mixed up with selfish motives and erroneous principles, and which are so difficult to detect and sift. The very secrecy of the act which is enjoined on us, "not to let our left hand know what our right doeth," is most difficult to be attained. In prayer or in fasting, which is between God and our own souls, we may be as thoroughly secluded from observation

as if we prayed or fasted in a wilderness, with no eye but that of God on us. Prayer—at least private prayer—is a solitary act, confined to our own selves; and the very rule laid down, is to go into the secrecy of our own chambers, and close the door against every prying eye or hearing ear. But almsgiving is necessarily connected with, and, to a certain extent, must be known to, others; and, in fact, *the world* acts on this principle of the love of ostentation in the human heart, and by its published lists and recorded contributions secures many a subscription from those who either love to see their names and their gifts in print, or who would be ashamed to see them left out. Such a motive as this comes under our Lord's censure; and, in either case, it has its appropriate reward,—it is done to be seen of men, and it *is* seen of men. But even supposing that our motives are as pure and as unselfish as they can be, there is another error to be guarded against, and that is, dwelling upon these acts with complacency afterwards, in our own hearts. Our kindnesses to others should be like our Christian life,—"hid with Christ in God;" and then, though hidden from human eye, they are not lost on Him. And what a comment on His own gracious declaration, "Thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly," is that description of the last day, when He who uttered these words represents Himself as saying to those on his right hand, "I was an

hungred, and ye gave me meat; thirsty, and ye gave me drink; naked, and ye clothed me; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me"! And when they, in surprise, and in ignorance of every recorded deed of kindness, shall ask, "When did we this to thee?" He will answer, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me."

SECTION XVI.

(Chapter vi. verses 6—18.)

As I said before with regard to almsgiving, our Lord takes it for granted that all his people are a praying people. The very mode in which He introduces the subject shows us this: "And thou, when thou prayest,"—as if it were a matter of impossibility to be a disciple of Christ, and not a man of prayer. And so indeed it is. You might as well attempt to show me a living man without breath, as a living Christian without prayer. Prayer is to the Christian what breath is to the living man; and as when a man ceases to breathe, he ceases to live, so when he gives up prayer he ceases to be a Christian. As the first act of the infant that is born into the world is to draw its first vital breath, so the first act of the new-born Christian, at whatever age the new birth may take place, is to breathe forth prayer. So it was with Saul the persecutor, when he was

smitten to the earth with blindness. "Behold he prayeth!" was the first indication of spiritual life within.

This precept of our Lord is chiefly confined to private and secret prayer. The place for secret prayer here pointed out is our own chamber, when the door is closed against the world, and the door of our hearts against worldly thoughts, and we are left alone, in the solitude of our own communings, and no eye but that of God is on us. It is the repetition of the Almighty's call by the prophet Isaiah, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment." And I believe, at least I have ever found it so, that there is a feeling strongly associated with some peculiar spot in which we are wont to offer prayer. It may be but a nook or a corner in a room, and yet so consecrated by long habit, that it seems, as it were, to breathe an atmosphere of prayer. And our own chamber is the scene of so many mercies; it bears, or ought to bear, so many a record of the Lord's presence with us and over us; it is so hallowed by the recollection of the Lord's untiring watchfulness over us, in our own unconscious hours of sleep; and perhaps, too, it has witnessed so many of the Lord's dealings with us, in seasons of sickness and suffering; our early waywardness, and repinings, and murmurings at his fatherly corrections, and our gradual convictions that all

his ways were only ways of love; and then the sweet surrender of ourselves into his hands, to deal with us as He pleased,—that our Lord's selection of our own closet or chamber as our place of private prayer, seems at once to recommend itself to every feeling, recollection, and experience. And yet, in reality, the spot where we pray is of little consequence. Jacob's place of prayer once was when he was alone, on his dreary journey from Beersheba to Haran, and he had laid down to rest, with a heap of stones for his pillow; Jonah prayed in the whale's belly; Elijah beneath a juniper, and Nathanael beneath a fig-tree; while the Ethiopian eunuch read his Bible and communed with God as he travelled in his chariot through the wilderness of Gaza; and I have no doubt that in these our days many a fervent prayer is offered up and accepted even from the crowded street or the busy field; from many a professional man's office, and from many a mechanic's workshop, or many a weaver's loom. The moment of emergency is the moment of prayer; and wherever and whenever that arises, there the Christian's soul is on the wing, and mounting up in prayer to the throne of God. Prayer is, in fact, our hand holding fast by God's hand; and prayer, therefore, is the Christian's safest attitude, as well as his sweetest solace and his most precious privilege.

SECTION XVII.

(Chapter vi. verses 19—24.)

It is very important to our eternal interests, that our estimates of this world and the next be founded on correct data, or we shall make most serious and fatal mistakes; and it is to enable us to do this accurately that our Lord proceeds to lay down certain facts, and from those facts to deduce certain inferences, and certain rules of conduct. Our Lord takes it for granted that every man has something or other on which he sets his heart, which he most earnestly covets, and to obtain which he will exert all his energies. This thing, whatever it may be, is expressed here by the word "treasure;" but it does not imply riches only,—it means, everything by which the heart is, or may be, taken captive,—pleasure, ambition, honour, as well as wealth. And even the natural affections of the heart, though innocent in themselves, and fixed on an innocent object, if carried to excess and degenerating into somewhat of an idolatrous character, are included among those treasures on which our Lord charges us not to set an undue value. And the reason He assigns is this: that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. Whatever absorbs our affections or desires, will naturally absorb also our time, our service, our devotion. And of these earthly things which are the main objects of man's pursuit, we

are here told that they are liable to corruption and decay; or, in the language of our Lord's metaphor, that the moth devours them, and the rust corrodes,—a metaphor strikingly expressive to an Oriental ear, where the storing of garments and of metals was carried to such an extent. And so we may say of most earthly objects of desire, not merely that they wither and decay, but that, when attained, they do not retain that vivid zest and strong hold on our imagination which they promised, and perhaps possessed at first. They soon pall and nauseate upon the appetite; they either cease in themselves to give us pleasure, or we cease to find pleasure in them. And this description is true of all the more worthless and merely earthly objects of desire. But even supposing they do retain their original worth and interest, and that every added year of possession and enjoyment developes more and more to win and augment our regard and rivet our best affections, still our Lord tenderly cautions us against undue attachment or *idolizing* any earthly blessing, because "thieves break through and steal." Sickness and disease interrupt, and teach us by what a slender thread we hold them; or if the idolatry be carried to excess, and lead us to repine and murmur at God's dealings, and complain of them as harsh and unkind, then perhaps death, the most unsparing of thieves, is permitted to break through every barrier, and carry off the "treasure." The inference, therefore, is, that we should seek to

lay up treasure where no such contingencies, no such casualties, can occur; where no interruption, no diminution, no decay can take place,—an inference which the Apostle Paul afterwards expands into the following precept:—"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." And in that golden Psalm of David (the xvith), Christ himself, by the mouth of his servant David, has declared what His portion is at God's right hand,—"At thy right hand are pleasures for evermore."

Our Lord adds a very necessary warning,—that we do not attempt to join the two together,—the love and service of the world with the love and service of God. It is not merely that the endeavour may, and most likely will, end in disappointment; it is a natural impossibility. Our Lord's words are not, You must not; you had better not; but you *cannot* unite the two services. Choose you, then, this day whom you will serve; and may your choice be Joshua's choice! May you, with Hobab, cast in your lot with the people of God; for they will do you good.

SECTION XVIII.

(Chapter vi. verse 25 to the end.)

THE further we get into this wonderful sermon of Christ's, the more reason we have, not so much to be astonished at the wisdom with which He spake, as to bless the love and compassion which ever led Him to preach it, and which has left so faithful a transcript of it on record for the consolation of his people for ever. The portion of it which I have now read is singularly adapted to the followers of a lowly and suffering Saviour; and it was no doubt peculiarly appropriate to those who heard it first; for they were to go forth into the world, literally dependent on God's supply of every want from day to day, and hour to hour. They were to take with them neither purse nor scrip,—neither means for to-day, nor stores for to-morrow; and one can well imagine how often, amid the perils, and privations, and sufferings of a single day, they must have felt, in all their weight and truth, our Lord's words, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." And at the close of such a day (and many and many such days they must have had, 1 Cor. iv. 11, 12, 13) how gladly would they recall their Saviour's precept, "Take no thought for the morrow," and have felt, that had anxiety for the morrow been added to the load of to-day, it would have been a burden too heavy for them to bear.

But the followers of Jesus are, generally speaking, a poor people. If conformed to him in *all* things, they must, of course, be conformed to him in poverty and suffering; for he, too, knew what it was to be an hungred and athirst, and what it was to have nowhere to lay his head. Now, I do not mean to say that naturally any man loves poverty, or that even our Saviour's example can render poverty, in itself, less painful or less trying; but this I say, that our Lord has taken away the reproach of poverty, and that, perhaps, is its bitterest sting. And even with these blessed rules and precepts which I have just read, I know how hard a thing it is for one struggling with difficulties, and those difficulties perhaps increasing every day. It would be, perhaps, almost mockery to say to such a one, "Be not anxious about to-morrow." We *must* be anxious, and the more anxious the more urgent the need. The mother watching over the couch of a sick child, and who anticipates with the coming dawn the decisive change that is to restore or take away her babe, does not she watch with the intensest anxiety every heaving of the chest, or flushing of the cheek, or quivering of the lip? And so, in ordinary life, we must be anxious,—must be careful even for to-morrow. The gospel nowhere forbids due precaution, due anxiety and forethought; the very operations of human industry have all a prospective tendency; but what we are here enjoined to avoid, is a carking, repining, fretful,

distrustful anxiety,—an anxiety that, in its cares for to-morrow, neglects the duties of to-day; an anxiety that altogether puts God out of the question, as if our own hand and arm were alone concerned, and it was not *his* blessing that made rich. God's care is over all his works; He provides alike the berry on the tree, and the grain on the ground for the bird that needs it, unconscious of the hand that placed it there. At the same time, while relying on God, and reposing all our care on Him, we must not expect more from God than He has promised, nor neglect the condition He has affixed to his promise. The condition is, "Seek *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness;" and the promise is, "All these things shall be added unto you." But what are "these things"? We are told, in verse 31, "food and raiment." It has been well said, "God's declaration is, 'Thou shalt be fed,' not 'Thou shalt be feasted;'" and as the apostle tells us that "godliness with contentment is great gain," let us combine our Lord's precept with that of the apostle, Let us "seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," and then, "having food and raiment let us be therewith content."

SECTION XIX.

(Chapter vii. verses 1—7.)

As the last portion of Scripture seemed to be a comment on that petition in the Lord's Prayer for daily bread, so the present portion may be said to be a comment on the next petition, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." There is one thing taken for granted with respect to ourselves and our fellow-creatures, which may well induce humility as regards ourselves, and charity as regards our brothers, and that is, that we are alike sinners before God. We are told of our own heart, that it is a very incomprehensible and very deceitful thing; and there is no one who has fairly tried thoroughly to understand his own heart but has been baffled by its evasions, its excuses, its windings, and palliations of all its errors, and has been forced to exclaim with the prophet, "The heart is deceitful above all things; who can understand it?" If, then, we find it so difficult to read our own hearts, and know our own motives and reasons for all we do, we may well acknowledge that another's heart must be far more impenetrable to us. We are not forbidden all judgment on a brother's *conduct;* and must often be called upon, even in the common intercourse of life, to pronounce our opinion, and not merely to give utterance, but publicity also to that opinion. And our

Lord himself has given us a clue by which to regulate our judgment, when he said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." If, for instance, we saw a man reeling along our streets through drink, we are not, we could not, close our eyes upon his sin, however we might pity the sinner; but even then, unless we know to the contrary, we are to judge charitably,—to hope that it may have been the first sin of its kind, or that he has fallen unawares, or that he may be sorry for his sin, and go and sin no more. And with these feelings, and in this hope, we should be inclined, with the filial piety of Shem and Japheth, rather to throw a garment over the errors of a brother, in order to hide them, than, in the spirit of Ham, to uncover his nakedness, and expose it to the jeers of a scoffing world. Even with all the deceitfulness and evasions of our own heart, if we deal fairly with it and with ourselves, we shall be sure to know quite enough as to action and motive, to commissions and omissions, to shortcomings and misdoings, to lay us low in the dust, with our hands upon our mouths, before God, as one who communed closely with himself said, "I may *suspect* much that is bad in my neighbour, but I *know* far worse against myself than I can possibly know against him." It is God's prerogative to judge the heart; and we must leave to him its hidden motives. It is an excellent rule of the apostle, that charity thinketh no evil,—that is, human kindness always puts the best construction it can on

another's conduct; and that because we ourselves stand in the presence of God, who searcheth our hearts, and will mete to us with the same measure which we use towards our fellow-creatures.

SECTION XX.

(Chapter vii. verses 8—13.)

We have already had an injunction relative to prayer,—the mode in which we *should not*, and the mode in which we *should*, pray, and the place where we may most effectually offer up our prayer. In the present portion of Scripture we are taught that prayer is the appointed channel by which God's blessings are conveyed to us, and we are assured that those blessings, if sought in the appointed way, will without doubt be given to us. As we read these words, the very first thing that strikes us is the simplicity and conciseness of the rules laid down, and the clearness and plainness of the promises annexed to each. It illustrates a remark no doubt often made, that in all things necessary and important for us to know clearly and distinctly, the Bible uses a plainness that can neither be misunderstood nor evaded. Can any words be more simple than these—"ask," "seek," "knock"? Every child knows their meaning and their purpose; and the instinct of every heart prompts to the practice. Nay, the more poor, the more needy, the more

miserable, and the more sensible of our wants and misery, we are, the more clearly do we know the meaning and the value of these three simple but most impressive monosyllables, as well as the consolation of the promises annexed to them:—"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." In what sense, then, are we to understand these words? Are we to take them as if they conveyed to us an unerring, indefeasible right of claim,—as if we had but to ask, and the literal promise was fulfilled,—that we should receive exactly in the terms, and in the proportion, of our request; that whatever we solicited, we should have; that the Giver was to exercise no judgment, and have no control, but be the mere passive agent or channel through which blessing or bounty was to flow, irrespective of its source; —or, in one word, that the gift should cease to be a gift, and become a right which we could claim? Our own reason would at once convince us how unfounded such a supposition must be even as regards an earthly benefactor, whose knowledge is finite, whose judgment is fallible, and whose passions are ever impulsive. But our Lord guards against any such misconception of His own promise, even if it could exist, by contrasting the finite love, and the wayward impulses, and the erroneous judgment, of an earthly father, with the unbounded tenderness and unerring wisdom of our Father which is in heaven. And

we are distinctly told that we often ask, and do not receive because we ask amiss; so that in every instance the denial is as much the result of love, as the grant, in many an instance, would be an evidence of displeasure. "Give me children, or I die," was the rash petition of the patriarch's wife;—her prayer was granted, and she died. And Elijah and Job are equally striking instances of mistaken and erroneous prayer. The promises, however, annexed to prayer, in this and other passages of Scripture, are so ample and extensive, that we may well say they exceed all that we can desire or ask; and we may add, that the promise is as abundantly and as tenderly fulfilled in denying as in granting. The promise emanates from the highest Love and the most unerring Knowledge; and as the earthly father's affection for his child leads him to withhold or grant according as he knows to be most for his child's good, so our heavenly Father fulfils His promise by withholding no manner of thing that is good, and withdrawing all that would be to our hurt or hindrance.

SECTION XXI.

(Chapter vii. verses 14—21.)

THIS passage is another illustration of the simplicity and plainness of Scripture precepts; so clear, that a wayfaring man need not err therein, and so distinct, that he who runs may read. No one, in the solemn day of inquiry, can plead ignorance of his duty. We are here told that there are but two great high roads in which the human race are walking; there may be millions of by-paths, "every one," as the prophet saith, "to his own way." But the great lines of road in human life are but two. They commence from the same point, both of time and place; and for a time run nearly in the same direction. The time commences at our birth; and the place where we may be said to commence our Christian course is at the font. Every child that is born into the world has a course to run;—it may be, with many, but a step; and they are, in mercy, soon withdrawn from the ruggedness of life's road, and the ungenial temperament of life's climate;—but to those whose span of existence is prolonged, they very soon reach that point where the two gates stand side by side, and the respective roads branch off, and where each passer-by or traveller must make his choice in which to walk.

The first thing which strikes us here is the

free agency of man. When Joshua recapitulated to Israel all the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, and His dealings with them, he closes the detail by saying, "*Choose* ye this day whom ye will serve." And when Elijah, on Mount Carmel, would have reclaimed Israel from the idolatries of Baal, he again gave them the free agency of their own choice: "If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." But the blessed Jesus, with more of tenderness and compassion, while he leaves the choice still unshackled and free, not only describes each path so accurately that every traveller may recognise it as he comes up to the gate through which he must pass, but He carries each, as it were, in prospective vision to the termination of both roads, and with emphatic fidelity warns alike of the end of the one in hell, as he points to the close of the other in heaven. Who, then, we might well ask, *could* misunderstand? and yet the many, the majority, are crowding in the one; the few, treading and toiling along the other.

There is a second observation, which adds to the awful character of our Lord's description of these roads, as well as to the interest with which we may be supposed to watch each traveller as he passes onward; and it is, that, though He distinctly tells us *what* the end of each is, He nowhere tells us when, or in what part of the road that end is. We know, for our own senses tell us, that along each path, in almost every portion

of the road, there are sundry hidden and imperceptible doors or chasms, through one or other of which traveller after traveller drops and disappears, and is no more seen; either sinking at once into hell, or admitted, without further toil or struggle, into the homes of heaven. How often do we see those who set out on the course of life together, when they come to the point of divergence, thoughtlessly and joyously rush through the wide and open gate, as if there were no peril, no risk, no end; and soon one of them falls through a concealed trap-door, and is seen no more;—while his companion, startled at the awful catastrophe and his own narrow escape, pauses for a moment in his career, and half turns back to retrace his steps, when, perhaps, some companion in advance beckons to him, or some other travellers from behind throng along the way and hurry him onwards, till another trap-door yawns in his path, and he, too, is hopelessly and immediately swallowed up for ever! How important, then, the choice which we make—a choice for eternity! The gate that leads to the narrow way is indeed a strait and scanty one; but, thank God! it is not a closed one, and never will be, as long as there is a sinner seeking to enter in by it. And however strait it is, it is ample enough to admit of every sinner, though too narrow to admit of a single sin. If you attempt to pass through it with one unrepented sin on your back, it will at once deny you entrance. But no sin-

ner, however heavy the load, however great the guilt, if he but lay it down, will ever be debarred access through that strait gate, on to the narrow way which leadeth unto life.

SECTION XXII.

(Chapter vii. verse 22 to the end.)

OUR Lord is now bringing his sermon to a close, and, by way of appropriate conclusion, gives a very emphatic and salutary description of the two great classes into which the world may be divided—those who profess, and those who practise; those who hear, and only hear, and those who hear and do; or, in other words, the hypocritical professor, and the fervent, faithful, and sincere practiser. There is, indeed, another class, those who neither hear nor do, neither profess nor practise, and who often take credit to themselves because they are not hypocrites; as if it mattered in which of the many by-paths from the broad road of sin a man walked, if it led at last to hell.

But the congregation to whom this sermon was first addressed were all hearers: they had all flocked to hear from the lips of Jesus the truths and holy precepts he should deliver, and apparently were earnest and sincere in their desire to listen; and he therefore lays this awakening consideration before them, that a mere out-

ward devotion, a mere lip-service, is of no avail. And I think we may go further, and say, that not even the desire of the heart, sincere and fervent as it may for the time be, will avail, unless it lead to something real, practical, and permanent—unless it issue in a thorough and abiding change of heart and life,—a total renunciation of sin, and a close walking with God in the Spirit. I would not say of all who cry, "Lord, Lord," that they are hypocrites: I would hope that many of them are not; I would hope that there are many who do wish to love and serve God faithfully—who do use the words of prayer not altogether in formality, but with reverence, and it may be fervour. And our Lord not only implies thus much, but would seem to intimate that there might be much active exertion in his service; that many, attracted by his miracles, and the power of working the same which would afterwards be conferred on his followers, would be zealous even in his cause, and yet, with all this, still remain unchanged in heart, and worldly—still cleave to inward sin, and have no personal interest in Christ; but would be resting on their meritorious services, and pleading them as their grounds and claim for acceptance.

The very illustration here used by our Lord, of the two builders, and the expressive word, "therefore," with which he connects the passages, seems to intimate this. Both parties are represented as builders, and therefore both as fully aware that they needed a house, or refuge from the

storm. They both apparently take equal labour to build, and for a time the buildings both equally answer the purpose of the builders, and, to the outward eye at least, there is little difference between them; or, if any, the unwise builder's structure is perhaps the more splendid and attractive. The great and real difference is in the foundation, and that is not seen till the time of trial, or the storm, arrives; that is, the defect is not perceived till the emergency has arisen, and it is too late to apply a remedy.

The warning here held out to us receives immeasurable force from the consideration, that not only is each one of us a builder, but that we are building for eternity. The house we have to build is the salvation of our souls; the storm that will test the solidity of the foundation is the hour of death. The rock, then, on which we are to build must be something real, substantial, and abiding. The mere profession will not stand the day of trial, nor even a career of active service and zealous energy, without a saving interest in Christ, and in Christ alone. The foundation would be equally ruinously defective if one corner were placed on the rock and another on the sand: it must be wholly and entirely on the rock. And so he that would stand firm in the hour of death and in the day of judgment must have both feet fast upon the rock—"and that rock is CHRIST."

SECTION XXIII.

(Chapter viii. verses 1—5.)

THERE is something in this brief narrative of our Lord's healing the leper which is exceedingly touching. It shows us what tenderness there was in the heart of Jesus when on earth: how ready to listen, how willing to answer even the feeblest cry of suffering or sorrow. What strikes me most in it is, not so much the power of Jesus to heal, as the compassionate adoption of the very words of the prayer that was addressed to him, in which to convey the answer to that prayer. "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," was the prayer. "I will; be thou clean," the answer; and as if to show that the words even of the prayer, simple as they were, had been accepted, the result is told in the very phrase the leper had used: "Immediately his leprosy was cleansed." It is a sweet chain of links closely uniting the petition and the answer: "If thou wilt;" "I will." "Thou canst make me clean;" "Be thou cleansed." And he *was* "cleansed," and that immediately, as the very words fell from the lips of Jesus.

Let us look for a moment to the case of this leper: he is a representation of ourselves, for the leprosy was a very significant type of our own sinful estate before God. The prophet, no doubt, had the leper's miserable condition in his mind

when he so fearfully, but so faithfully, portrayed our condition, that "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores." The leprosy was incurable by man; God, who sent the malady, could alone heal. It is altogether taken out of the hands of the ordinary physicians: no remedy is prescribed, no human cure hinted; the priest alone had power to pronounce clean or unclean, but here his power ended: he had no power to make clean. This leper then, thus helpless in himself, and thus hopeless in his fellow-creatures, comes to Jesus. It was in the very beginning of Jesus' ministry; and though his fame was already known, both as a teacher sent from God, and as a worker of miracles—for he had already turned the water into wine—yet this was undoubtedly the first recorded application to him for his healing power over leprosy. It was the belief of the Jews that none but God could heal that disease; and this man, therefore, must have been painfully impressed with the notion, or belief, that his malady was beyond the reach of human aid. Yet he goes to Jesus; as St. Luke tells us, "he fell on his face before him;" and as St. Matthew here adds, "he worshipped him," and addressed him as "Lord." Were these, then, the mere acts of outward reverence and Oriental adoration to mere man, however exalted, accompanied as they were with the undoubted acknowledgment of his power to heal a malady which every Jew

believed that God alone could heal? It may be said that his faith is defective in implying a doubt of Christ's willingness to heal, and that our Lord's taking up his own words convey a rebuke of this doubt. But is not the limitation, "If thou wilt," affixed virtually to every prayer of every child of God? Was it not the limitation affixed to our Lord's own prayer, in his hour of agony, "Father, if it be possible, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done"?

At any rate, we need ourselves have no fears of Christ's willingness to heal that disease of which leprosy was the type; we need affix no limitations of reserve or doubt to our prayers for the removal of sin. It was the very purpose for which Jesus came into the world—"to take away sin;"—it was the very cause for which the name of "Jesus" was given to him, because he should "save his people from their sins;" and however great their number, however deep their dye, however inveterate their stain, they are neither beyond his power, nor his willingness, to blot out and cleanse. He has opened, blessed be his name! a fountain not only for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but for us too, a fountain for sin and uncleanness, in which whosoever washes shall immediately be cleansed, and be healed of whatsoever disease he has. It is not Christ's willingness that we have to doubt, but our own; and the prayer of each one should

be, "Lord, make *me* willing in the day of thy power."

SECTION XXIV.

(Chapter viii. verses 6—14.)

In the account given by St. Luke of this incident of the centurion, we find that he did not come himself to Jesus, but sent elders of the Jews to solicit Jesus in behalf of his servant, from the feeling that he himself, as a Gentile, was unworthy to come into His presence. St. Matthew is no doubt narrating the same incident; and as a master is often said to do that which he directs his servants to do, so the evangelist here represents the centurion as doing that which, in reality, he sent the Jewish elders to do for him.

In the healing of the leper, we had a striking instance of that poor man's faith and trust in Jesus under his melancholy condition; and yet our Lord here says of this centurion, that he had not found faith so great as his in all Israel. It may be instructive, therefore, to consider briefly, in what the great faith of this centurion consisted, and wherein it merited the commendation of having exceeded that of every Israelite. This centurion was a heathen, and a Roman officer, neither position peculiarly favourable for growth in grace, for humility, or faith in a Redeemer; yet he appears to have been a man

of natural kindliness of heart, and of liberality of disposition; his compassion towards his servant in time of sickness evinces the one, and the fact of his having built a synagogue for the Jews, testifies to the other. That he was lowly in his own eyes, his whole conduct shows: he did not deem himself worthy to come, even as a suppliant, into the presence of Jesus, far less did he presume to ask that Jesus should deign to come under his roof. But how, then, was his request to be granted? how was that servant, for whom he was so deeply interested, to be healed of his palsy? It had long been the belief of the Jews that the personal presence of a messenger or prophet of God was necessary to effect a cure; that in all miraculous agency, the human instrument must employ human and personal means. Thus when the Shunammite's son had died, and the afflicted mother had gone to Elisha to implore his aid, she would not be content with his sending Gehazi with his staff to restore the child, but she declared her purpose not to leave him till he had himself accompanied her to the chamber of death. A similar feeling may perhaps account, in some degree, for Naaman's incredulity and wrath, when his cure was to be effected without the prophet's personal instrumentality. And so now, whatever might be their ideas of Christ's own power, they still believed, that unless he were present he could do nothing. It was probably this same feeling which prompted the earnest cry of an

afflicted father to Jesus, on a somewhat similar occasion, "Sir, come down, ere my child die."

Such was Jewish belief; what was this heathen's belief and avowal? In reply to the gracious and condescending intimation of the Saviour, "I will come and heal him," he at once disclaims the honour as too great for such as he, but at the same time avows his thorough confidence, his undoubting, nay, his sublime conviction, that Jesus had but to speak the word, and disease and sickness, however imminent or however distant, would yield instant obedience to his mandate; and that with a thousandfold greater alacrity and zeal than his own commands were obeyed by the soldiers under himself, or the servant who waited on his will, would the word of Jesus be obeyed, and his servant should be healed. It was the very spirit, the very feeling, the very faith, for the absence of which God himself had reproached his people Israel by the mouth of his prophet, "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off?" The centurion's faith was otherwise: he believed that God was a God equally afar off as nigh, and in this he exceeded the faith of Israel. Jesus is now in heaven, but he is very nigh to every one of us. We have each of us a sickness to be healed. Oh, let the cry of our hearts be, "Lord, heal me, and I shall be healed!"

SECTION XXV.

(Chapter viii. verses 15—18.)

In the two first of the verses just read, we have one of those interesting little family sketches which are occasionally, but not often, presented to us in the New Testament. It is but an outline; yet in that outline we catch the features of a family at once united in themselves, and united in the common bond of love to the Saviour,—an amiable and affectionate, and at the same time a religious, domestic circle. We find from St. Mark's Gospel that this incident of healing Peter's mother-in-law occurred on the Sabbath-day. It is probable that Peter's house was the abode, it certainly was the resort, of Jesus during his frequent stays at Capernaum. He had, we know, no home of his own, for he himself tells us in this very chapter, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." And blessed indeed was the roof, however lowly, that sheltered the Saviour's head! Simon and his wife, his wife's mother, and his own brother Andrew, resided in the same house—a union of family ties cemented by mutual affection, and a common bond of love to Jesus. Peter is here represented to us in the most amiable light of domestic relationship, and as offering, under his own roof, a home for the widowed mother of his

wife. And yet, though that home was probably the home of Jesus also, though assuredly he resorted thither, if he did not reside there, yet sickness, and sorrow, and suffering were permitted to enter it. We nowhere find religion conveying any exemption from the ordinary calamities of life, nor the presence of the Saviour granting an immunity from sufferings. It was the same with the disciples on the sea of Galilee, when the storm overtook them, though Jesus was in the ship with them; it was the same in the house at Bethany, though "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." Peter's home was a home of affection and harmony, of peace and mutual goodwill, among the relatives who lived with him; and, above all, it was a home of religious observance, a home in which the Saviour was loved, and honoured, and obeyed; and yet into this home was sickness permitted to enter.

On the morning of this holy day—for, as I have said, it was the Sabbath—Jesus had been ministering in the synagogue at Capernaum, and on his return finds the little community of his friends and followers in anxiety and sorrow for one of its members laid on a bed of sickness; and with that tender compassion which felt for all, and which denied none, he instantly listened to their tale of grief, and with condescending sympathy entered the sick chamber, took the sufferer by the hand, and immediately the fever

left her. He who by a single word had healed the unclean leper, and who without a word had caused disease to depart from the centurion's servant, now with a single touch restored this sick one to instant health and perfect strength.

And then again, on the evening of the same Sabbath, unwearied by its previous ministrations and labours, he once more engages in the heavenly office of healing all the diseased and suffering from every quarter who were brought unto him; realizing and fulfilling the prophet's description of His gracious work, "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." But in what sense can Jesus be said to bear our sicknesses and infirmities? Not literally, for sickness and suffering, decay and infirmity, are still the portion of the sons of men. But as the sting of death is sin, so sin is the heaviest portion of suffering; and in every cross which we may be called upon to take up, Jesus still bears the heaviest end,* for the "Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Oh then, let us seek to have Jesus abiding with us alike in our homes and our hearts; and though trouble may assail, yet He has said of Himself, that "He is a very present help in every time of trouble."

* Flavel.

SECTION XXVI.

(Chapter viii. verses 19—28.)

It is not only a rule of natural reason, but of revelation also, that before we undertake any work of consequence, we sit down and count the cost; that is, that we ascertain the difficulties of any enterprise we may undertake, or any service we may engage in, and how far we may be enabled to meet and overcome them. The apostle tells us that "it is good to be zealously affected in a good thing." Zeal springs from love, and love produces both sincerity of purpose and earnest ness of aim. There is something so earnest, so straightforward, so attractive in zeal, that it at once wins our affection and approval. And certainly, if we were to look to the language, and possibly the manner also, of this scribe who came to Jesus, we might have been inclined to say of him, as Jesus himself said of another on a later occasion, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven;" or, like the rich young man who came to Jesus to ask the way to eternal life, as we beheld him we might have "loved" him too. "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." It sounds like the honest determination of a sincere and unhesitating heart;—no scruples, no evasions, no compromises, no lookings back on Sodom, no *ifs* in the matter;—but the unflinching avowal of one who had made up his mind to a

certain line of conduct. And to what did his determination lead him? To follow Jesus whithersoever He went. And *we* know whither that path would have led him, had he walked in it. It would have led him to the sacrifice of all he valued on earth—to a career of obloquy and reproach, of persecution, and most probably of death. The same phrase is used in the Book of Revelation, of those 144,000, who were in reality the first-fruits of martyrdom: "These follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth;" whether it be to prison or to death. What was there, then, in the offer of this scribe that would imply it was not equally sincere, equally zealous? Its language was the same—its offer the same; and yet He who readeth the heart saw beneath this fair exterior a very different motive from that of love to Jesus, or a desire to take up the cross and follow him. *We* can only judge of man by his conduct and his language—we cannot read the heart. The heart of man to us is as a closed window; no one can look through the darkened shutters of a room, and see what is going on within: and just so is the heart of man to us. But with God it is far otherwise. God can read the heart of every man as readily, and far more readily, than we could see through an open window, or I can read the words of this book. He reads every hidden motive, every lurking thought, every secret impulse. In fact, the heart of every living being is as an open book before God. And what did he read in

the naked, open heart of this scribe? His answer in a measure tells us. This ardent, would-be follower of Jesus was no doubt fully aware of and himself shared in, the expectation of his country, that a Deliverer was about to arise who should restore the kingdom to Israel. And he had in all probability witnessed many of the miracles of Jesus, and had concluded in his own mind that to follow Him where he was going would be to follow Him to wealth, dominion, and honour; and perhaps thought that his acknowledging Him thus early, in His humiliation and poverty, would entitle him to higher distinction and reward. How mortifying, then, the reply—what a downfall of all his hopes! "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." We hear no more of him; and, in all probability, like the rich young man, "he went away grieved"—grieved at his disappointment, and sorry for the failure of all his projects; yet perhaps glad that he had not been taken at his word. Jesus will accept of no divided heart, of no compromise between His service and the world's. If, indeed, we belong to Jesus, we must be prepared not only to follow Him whithersoever He goeth, but to set out without delay,—not to linger needlessly in the precincts of human ties and earthly affections; or, as he himself expresses it: "Whoso loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me." The religion of Jesus interferes with no earthly tie,

no human affection; it neutralizes no duty—it sanctifies all; but it teaches us at the same time not to allow any earthly ties or affections to usurp an undue power or exercise an unlimited sway over us. Oh, then, let us be careful to follow Jesus whithersoever He calleth us. The storm may overtake us, as it did His disciples, but He will be nigh to aid; and even at the last, when we are walking through the dark valley of the shadow of death, we are but treading the path He trod, and following His steps; and His rod and His staff, they shall guide as well as comfort us.

SECTION XXVII.

(Chapter viii. verse 29 to the end.)

THERE is much in this passage of Scripture that at first sight may excite surprise, and lead to the asking of many vain and curious questions. The narrative in all its bearings is so different from what occurs in our own times, that difficulties have arisen in explaining its various parts, and even doubts have been thrown upon an incident which is, perhaps, more replete with instruction than almost any other in Scripture. The possession of these unhappy demoniacs by evil spirits in such appalling numbers, the expulsion of them from the unhappy victims of their malice, the permission obtained by them to enter into the herd of swine, the reasons for

that permission, the consequent destruction of the whole herd, and the subsequent conduct of the Gadarenes,—all afford a vast variety of instructive and important observations. I shall, however, confine myself chiefly to the conduct evinced by the Gadarenes on this occasion to the Saviour, as affording another melancholy proof of the power of Satan over the minds and actions of men. We can have no doubt that it was He who, by His agents, had taken possession of these two unhappy men, had driven them from human habitations to roam and howl, as maniac outcasts, amid the tombs and dwellings of the dead. It was, indeed, a sad and melancholy condition—an humiliating proof of the degradation to which human intellect can be reduced, and of the feeble tenure by which our faculties are held. Of all the maladies to which the human frame is liable, the most saddening and the most irreparable is the quenching of the light of reason; and I would just say that there is not a day that dawns upon us, that restored reason and continued intellect should not form one of the subjects of our most fervent thanksgiving to a gracious God. We may not in these days, it is true, have acknowledged cases of demoniacal possession in the same way and the same degree as in our Saviour's time, when, for wise and especial purposes, Satan was permitted to exercise such fierce and evident control over the bodies and minds of men. But we cannot

close our eyes, in many an unhappy instance, even now, to the instigation of that evil spirit, whose delight and exultation is in the ruin of his victims. Even now there are those caught "in the snare of the devil, and taken captive by him at his will." And it is to this instigation, this influence of the evil one, that I would resolve the conduct of the Gadarenes on this occasion—an influence as undoubted and as fatal as it had been over the unhappy outcasts themselves. Those melancholy maniacs had long been the terror of the neighbourhood, by their ferocity and violence,—"no man could pass that way" for fear of injury and outrage. On a sudden, the rumour reaches the city that a stranger, driven by a tempest to their shores, had met these maniacs, and by a word had healed them;—not merely rendered them harmless, but had restored them to reason and intellect, and that one at least was sitting at the feet of Jesus, "clothed, and in his right mind." The first impulse of men's minds on hearing such extraordinary tidings, would be to rush forth and see him by whom such wonderful deeds were done, and that was the very impulse which prevailed here,—"the whole city went out to meet Jesus." But it was in no reverence, in no affection, in no gratitude, in no desire to detain Him even for a time among them. The same messenger that had brought the tidings of the miracle of healing, announced also the destruction of their herds of swine—that forbidden

traffic in which, from the love of gain, they had engaged. Though unhumbled by the rebuke, they dreaded his power; the punishment of their own sin cancelled the mercy of the miracle, and Satan was, as usual, close at hand to suggest all hard thoughts of God. So, when they saw Jesus, instead of falling at His feet in reverence and awe,—instead of the accents of praise and thanksgiving for the restoration and deliverance of their unhappy countrymen,—instead of beseeching Him that He would tarry with them, they "besought Him that he would depart out of their coasts." Two, indeed, whom Satan had long bound in misery and iron, were rescued from his hands; but a whole city riveted his chains more firmly; and the same miracle, like the preaching of the gospel now, that was a savour of life unto life to the one, became a savour of death unto death to the other.

SECTION XXVIII.

(Chapter ix. verses 1—9.)

It has been often remarked, that God many a time gives us more than we either ask or deserve. That he gives more than we deserve, few can possibly doubt, for all that we *deserve* at the hands of God is but condemnation and punishment. That he also gives us more than we ask, I believe the experience of every one of his

children will testify; and, oh! what a record of unsought mercy and unsolicited blessing will the disclosures of the last day bring to light! How many in that day will give praise and thanksgiving unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, for the love that sought them when they thought not of Him, and for the tenderness that led them by ways they knew not, and by paths they had not known, till He brought them into pleasant pastures and to living waters! It is one of the characteristics of God, as described by the prophet, "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not;" and if such is His measure of mercy even to them that ask Him not, how much more shall our heavenly Father give abundantly to them that ask.

We have an instance of this in the poor paralytic man in this chapter, both as regards himself, who apparently did not ask, and as regards his friends and relatives, who did ask in his behalf. In all probability, this diseased man was not only a cripple in his limbs, but deprived of the power of speech, and perhaps also of mind and memory and reason. Not a word is said of *his* desire to apply to Christ: it was not *his* faith that was commended; he seems to have lain there, a poor, helpless, pitiable paralytic—an apt representation of every one of us; for in ourselves we are equally vile and helpless, unable not only to do anything in our own

behalf, but, alas! even to wish or desire anything that is good, unconscious of our state; or, if a thought passes through the mind, willing and desirous to continue in it.

We learn from the other Gospels how these friends of the poor cripple succeeded in placing this miserable object of their anxieties at the feet of Jesus, undeterred by the crowds that would have hindered, disregarding every obstacle, and confident that, if they could but once bring the helpless being to the notice of Jesus, he both could and would heal him. Nor were their hopes misplaced,—Jesus both saw and commended; but what did he commend? Not their humanity, though that was great and evident to all,—not their zeal and perseverance, though that, too, had been great and unremitting,—but he commended their *faith*, and rewards it by at once granting not only what they sought, but what, perhaps, they never thought of seeking. Like a wise physician, Jesus lays his finger on the plague-spot. He probes the core of the disease, and by removing the cause, the malady disappears also. Sin is the cause of human suffering; and therefore, to forgive sin is to remove the sorest and the heaviest burden. It was with this view, and to show forth his own power, as God, to forgive sins, that Jesus said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." And was not this far beyond their hopes and their desires?

They sought the cure of his bodily ailment, and, with that Jesus grants also the healing of his soul's disease.

It would be interesting to dwell for a moment on the altered feelings with which that little company had quitted their home that day, and now returned to it; but Scripture has drawn a veil over it; and perhaps the first communings of a forgiven penitent with his God are too sacred, too private, to be the theme of observation. We are told, however, that all the people who had witnessed this wonderful display of goodness, "*glorified God*, who had given such powers unto men." They passed by, as it were, the apparently human instrument, and carried their thoughts and their accents of praise onwards and upwards to Him who had given the power. It is a valuable lesson to ourselves, that, while not forgetting the earthly benefactor, we forget not the heavenly one also; or, as St. Paul emphatically phrases it, "They glorified God in me."

SECTION XXIX.

(Chapter ix. verses 10—18.)

THE apostle, whose call, and ready compliance with that call, is here mentioned, is the writer of this Gospel. It is his own pen which gives the narrative of his own conversion; and perhaps no one ever yet gave an account of an event in his

own life, so solemn and important as this, in such simple, unpretending terms :—"As Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom : and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him."

Matthew's name is now a name of honour. It is known throughout the whole world, and will be had in everlasting remembrance. Generation after generation has dwelt with grateful fervour on the inspired truths which Matthew's pen recorded ; and *we* think of him only as of one of that holy band who followed Jesus on earth, and who now reign with Him in glory. But there was a time when Matthew's name was a name of reproach, and his calling a calling of obloquy ; and the other evangelists, in tenderness and love, conceal his ignominious name, and more frequently call him by his other name of Levi. But Matthew here calls himself by the name by which he was known in his odious calling of a publican, or tax-gatherer, as if to show that God had on purpose called the base things of the world to confound the things that were mighty, that to God alone in Christ might be the glory.

As we read the narrative, one perhaps at the moment feels something of the disappointment which Naaman the Syrian leper felt, when Elisha the prophet sent him the simple message, "Go, wash in Jordan, and be clean ;" and one longs to know more of the process and the steps by which

so thorough a conversion was effected. Here is a Jew, a publican, and, in the estimation of his countrymen, linked with the vilest of sinners, wedded to his calling and his wealth, actually engaged in the receipt of custom or money; his whole thoughts engrossed by this world and this world's concerns, and so little dreaming of giving up his pursuits, that had any one but a short time before told him that he would leave all and follow Jesus, he might have laughed him to scorn, or, with Hazael, indignantly repudiated the supposition,—"Am I a dog, that I should do this thing?"

And yet a lowly, humble man, with no outward pretensions,—no ensigns of power or authority,—passes by him as he sits at the receipt of custom, turns upon him one look, and utters the simple words, "Follow me!" and the same power which accompanied His word, when He said to the paralytic, "Arise; take up thy bed and walk," and enabled him to do so, now went forth with this simple bidding, "and he arose, and followed him." All the habits of past life, the pursuits, associations, and intimacies of former years, the interest of business, and the charms of wealth, were in one instant surrendered. St. Luke, in narrating the incident, adds, "*He left all*, and followed him;" Matthew alludes not to any sacrifice, any struggle. The surrender was no doubt complete, without a pang, without even a looking back on Sodom. It is a pleasing evidence of the sincerity of Matthew's

conversion, that his first recorded act was to gather his former associates and colleagues, and bring them to Jesus, though He does not himself mention that it was in his own house, and by his own act, that this was done. He simply records the fact, that Jesus was present at an entertainment, at which were assembled many publicans and sinners. It is the first desire of the converted heart to lead others to drink at the same fountain of living waters which has quenched its own thirst. It was so with Andrew. When he came to the knowledge of Jesus, "he first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ; *And he brought him to Jesus.*" It was the very injunction which our Lord laid on the healed demoniac, when He said to him, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them what great things the Lord hath done for thee." And so the first act of Matthew, after he had himself followed Jesus, was to bring others, if he could, to follow him also. It was indeed cavilled at; but Jesus vindicates himself and his followers by a declaration of the gracious purpose for which He came into the world, "to call sinners to repentance."

The same call which was made to Matthew has been made to us. "Follow me!" was the badge of our discipleship at our baptism; "Follow me!" was repeated at our confirmation, and has been continually repeated ever since. It has been whispered in the still, small voice; it has been

heard, perhaps, amid the fire, and the storm, and the whirlwind of passion; in the accents of mercy, and the thunder of wrath. Has power accompanied the call? Have we arisen at the call, and followed Jesus,—fully and unreservedly followed Him? There are others calling to us. The world says, Follow *me;* pleasure says, Follow me; endeared companions and associates say, Follow me; but has the reply of your hearts been, "Lord whom should we follow? to whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

SECTION XXX.

(Chapter ix. verses 18—26.)

In what a variety of ways, since we began this narrative of our Lord's ministry, have we seen sickness, and sorrow, and suffering enter into families, and assail the bodies and minds of men! And yet, one can hardly suppose that there was more of sorrow and suffering in those days than there is now. Some diseases, such as those of the possessed of the devils, were no doubt permitted of God then, for the manifestation of Christ's power over Satan; and leprosy was more a disease of the country and the age than it is at present. But in every other respect the sicknesses, and the sufferings which Jesus healed in Judea, are the sicknesses and sufferings incident to the human race, and are as sad and sorrowful

now as they were then. Human nature and human feeling is the same; and if sickness enter into a household,—if, as in the present instance, a beloved child is the victim on which death is about to lay his grasp,—to whom should we expect that the sorrowing father or the heart-broken mother, in their extremity of need, would have recourse, but to Him who woundeth and can heal; to Him who smiteth, and alone can bind up? And so it was here. A little daughter,—perhaps an only one, just emerged from infant years, and winding herself around her parents' hearts with all the artlessness and lovingness of childhood, for she was just twelve years of age,—is seized with illness. At first there seems to have been no thought of Jesus,—no recollection of, no reference to him. They no doubt sent for the physicians, and hoped and thought all would be well; but human help was vain, the malady increased, and now, when all earthly hope was gone, they seem to have remembered One mighty to save. Alas! how sad a representation of ourselves,—how sad an evidence, that, with many, prayer is the last resource! And yet, blessed and thrice blessed the affliction that drives us to Jesus! The sorrow that pierces our hearts may be the precursor of the grace that is about to enter; the shock that casts down our idol, may be the very means to re-erect the throne of God.

How sweet a revelation is that which God makes of himself by the apostle, "Who giveth to all men

liberally, *and upbraideth none*"! As I have said, these parents seem to have thought of Jesus last; nor was it till death had so nearly gained the victory, that the heart-stricken father speaks of her as one already dead; and, in fact, she did die ere Jesus reached the house. Yet not one word of censure, not one of reproach. The season of sorrow, in its first burst, in its deepest agony, perhaps in its most cutting self-reproaches, is not the season for rebuke; and He who by His Spirit had before said, "There is a time to speak, and a time to keep silence," would not unnecessarily "bruise the broken reed." He no doubt recognised, even in the gushing accents of a father's grief, the germ of a saving faith,—the bud, as it were, of that test, which, on a later occasion, He Himself applied to the sister of Lazarus, "He that believeth in me shall live, though he die." And so here the acknowledgment is, "My daughter is even now dead: but come lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live."

And how sweetly does Jesus speak of death! The maiden was indeed dead; life had departed from the tenement of clay, but her spirit was softly sleeping in Jesus, and "they that sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him." Death to our vision is but a ghastly sight, its associations are those of shrinking and of horror; and yet, to all God's children, and in the sight and in the language of God, it is but "sleep," a sleep, too, on which a joyous morning shall arise, an unclouded,

sinless, stainless day—a morning, on which the same voice that now recalled the spirit of this slumbering child, shall then pierce through every resting-place, whether on earth, or in the sea, or in the deep waters, and "all that are in their graves shall come forth." In another and a far more glorious sense we may say, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

SECTION XXXI.

(Chapter ix. verse 27 to the end.)

We have had, in the different maladies brought before Jesus for his healing power, very striking representations of the spiritual maladies of our race. The leprosy represented the foul and polluting nature of sin—the paralytic cripple on his couch or mat typified our lost and helpless condition, and utter inability to do anything of ourselves for our own relief; and now we have two blind men, an equally appropriate and perhaps more touching illustration of its kindred spiritual malady. Whether it be that leprosy seldom or never meets our eye, and we cannot therefore realize its horrors, and paralytic cripples are not often thrust upon our notice, but that blindness meets us at every turn,—there is something in the loss of sight that peculiarly moves our sympathy. In the midst of health and strength, with every

faculty of mind and body perfect, save one, the blind are yet, for the most part, helpless as little children; and when guided, as they often are, by the hands of little children, it is a touching picture, if we may so speak, of helplessness helping helplessness, of weakness propping weakness. It is recorded of Archbishop Leighton, that, one day meeting a blind beggar, his touching remark was, "Methinks this poor sufferer cries out in behalf of the whole human race as its representative, and let what he so earnestly craves be given to him, as readily as God bestows on the spiritually blind who need it." The blind are, indeed, an apt representation of our spiritual condition, and among the many symptoms of spiritual disease enumerated by our Saviour, in the church at Laodicea, blindness is one. "Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and *blind*, and naked." And yet how much of compensating mercy is there even in the withdrawal of one sense! how, generally speaking, are other faculties sharpened and strengthened by the privation of one! How many a source and channel of happiness, with which a stranger intermeddleth not, are opened to the blind, to the religious blind especially! How much of consolatory communion with God, how much of inward light and brightness, and the "opening of the eyes of the understanding," that puts to shame the darkness and blindness of those that do see! And so it was here. These blind men, even in the streets of

godless Capernaum, follow Jesus, proclaiming aloud, that he was the Son of David, that it was He that should come into the world; and the very terms in which Jesus grants their cure, attest the reality and sincerity of their conviction, "According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened." But few, if any, amid the crowd that followed him, save his own disciples, had the same conviction; and far happier and more blessed was the blindness which led them to Jesus than that sight, which, seeing, sees not, and doth not perceive. "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and they which see might be made blind." The same might be said of the dumb man, whose case comes next under review. No doubt unhappy in his affliction, separated from his kind, though not altogether an outcast from their sympathy, for they brought him to Jesus; and yet, afflicted as he was, "far better," as has been well said, "to be a dumb devil, than a blaspheming one." Better to have been for ever dumb, than to have employed the organs of speech, the very gifts of God, as these Pharisees did, in impugning His power, vilifying His work, and ascribing to the agency of Satan the operations of His love and goodness. It is a responsibility little thought of, that we are in possession of *our* faculties; it is a mercy little acknowledged, perhaps, with thanksgiving, that we have still our organs of sight, and speech, and hearing unimpaired; and yet these

are among the "talents" for which we must give account. It was a sad reproach on Israel, by the prophet, reiterated by the Saviour, and again by the apostle, "The heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

SECTION XXXII.

(Chapter x. verses 1—24.)

Our Lord, you remember, in his sermon on the mount, had said, "Take no thought for the morrow." He is now about to put his disciples' reception of that precept to the test, by sending them forth on a perilous and painful errand, without provision for the way, and in simple dependence on His promise.

Every injunction in this chapter is so extraordinary in itself,—every declaration contained throughout it so far more likely to repel than to attract—its assurances of persecution and suffering on every side and from every quarter, are so distinct, and clear, and formidable, that one can only account for the instant and zealous obedience with which they were received, by a power accompanying the words on the hearts of these twelve apo-

stles, as miraculous as when Jesus said to the paralytic, "Arise and walk," or to the ruler's child, "Maid, I say unto thee, Arise!" This mission was indeed confined to the house of Israel, to the cities of Judea and Galilee,—even Samaria was excluded on the present occasion; but as it lay between Judea and Galilee, and in passing from one to the other a traveller must needs pass by the way of the Samaritans, our Lord makes a distinction between them and the Gentiles: "Go not into *the way* of the Gentiles, and *into any city* of the Samaritans enter ye not." But even for this comparatively limited mission, no provision was to be made. Even the commonest necessaries of life were to be left,—not indeed to casual supply, or what the world might call chance, but to the express promise of Him who had said, "All these things shall be added unto you." And did that promise fail? Hear their own testimony:—"Jesus said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, *Nothing*." Well may we ask, with the son of Sirach, "Did any ever trust in the Lord and was confounded?" It might be supposed, that, sent forth as they were by Him—who had power over every element, who could with a word expel evil spirits from their dwelling in man, and recall departed life, He might and would exercise some secret and mysterious influence over the minds, and dispositions, and feelings of those among whom

they went, to win some, at least, to receive themselves with kindness, and their message with reverence. But there is no promise of the kind. They are, on the contrary, enjoined to shake off the dust of their feet as a testimony against the house or the city that would not receive them; and, if persecuted in one city, they were to flee to another. In fact, it is impossible to read this chapter and not feel that, from first to last, in all its progressive details, and all its predictions of augmented sufferings, it is like the command to the patriarch, to "take his son, his only son, Isaac, whom he loved,"—a heightening of distress in every step to try his faith, and magnify the promise of God. If there be an expression of tenderness,—a yearning for the desolate,—it is more for those to whom Jesus sends, than for the messengers whom He sends. There is something touching in the character under which he depicts those to whom he is sending, not Gentiles, not Samaritans, but Israel, and not merely Israel, but the house of Israel, and the lost sheep of that house,—children of the same covenant of promise with themselves, and still more pathetically recommended to their compassion as lost and wandering ones.*

The twelve had indeed miraculous powers conferred upon them; but these were solely as credentials of their message, and were in no way to be employed either for their support, their

* Bishop Jebb's Sac. Lit.

guidance, or their protection. "Freely ye have received, freely give;" "without money and without price." Nor were they to be miraculously guided in their course. "Into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, *enquire* who in it is worthy, and there abide;" and in like manner the only measure of protection held out to them was in the warning, "when they persecute you in one city, flee into another." It was, too, a gradation of suffering to which they were to be subjected. Councils, and rulers, and synagogues are too often the abettors of error and the oppressors of truth, yet many a martyr to public wrong has found consolation in his own family, and sympathy in the bosom of his friends; but with these all the ties of kindred are severed, and all the endearments of domestic love turned into bitterness. "The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death." Yet, it may be, even then, when these are embittered, and stirred up to hatred and wrong, there is perhaps one here, and one there, who still cleaves, or who generously takes the part of the hunted victim: but no! the last climax of suffering to these messengers of Jesus is, "Ye shall be hated of *all* men."

Well might the apostles declare, from their Lord's predictions, and their own experience, that "we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God."

SECTION XXXIII.

(Chapter x. verse 24 to the end.)

In the portion of the chapter which I read last, I said it was one unbroken prediction of persecution and suffering, heightened at every step. But did our Lord send forth his followers to toils, and dangers, and sufferings from which he himself shrunk? Were they alone to be exposed to obloquy and reproach, and their Master to be unassailable? Far from it. "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" When the mother of two of his disciples, James and John, solicited, though with mistaken views, for her sons that they might sit, the one on his right hand, and the other on his left in his kingdom, He intimated by his reply, that that post of honour and distinction was only to be attained by drinking of the same cup from which He himself drank, and being baptized with the same baptism with which He was baptized. And we know that the cup that He drank of was no cup of costly cordial; it was a cup of bitterness, and from which the human nature of Jesus himself shrunk: "Father, if it be possible," was his cry of agony, "let this cup pass from me." The baptism, too, with which He was to be baptized, was a baptism of blood,—the blood and the water streaming from his wounded side, and

pierced hands and feet; and well therefore might He now say to those whom He was sending forth on their perilous errand, "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord." If they revile you, they have already reviled me; if they lead you to death, it will not be till they have first nailed me to the cross. When I called you to "follow me," it was not to ease, and honour, and glory here, but to suffering and sorrow, to martyrdom and death. And yet fear not. Our Lord repeats this injunction to "fear not" three times, and each time for a different reason. "Fear them not: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known,"—that is, whatever cloud may now hang over your names and characters,—however hidden and obscured on earth,—however vilified and defamed, and a by-word among all people, there is a time coming when every cloud shall be rolled away, and all your motives, all your love and zeal, every sacrifice you have made, and every suffering you have endured for my sake, shall be revealed and acknowledged before my Father and the holy angels. Therefore, "Fear them not."

But again, "Fear them not." It is not the poor perishing body, over which man can exercise cruelty or power. They may kill the body, they may crush the life; but there their power, though, it may be, not their will, ends. Fear them not, then, but rather fear to offend, to grieve,

or to forsake Him, whose power extends beyond the grave, and who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Set the higher fear against the lower one. Fear God; but fear not man.

And again I say unto you, "Fear them not." I am sending you forth into a cold and selfish world, but it is on my errand, and with my message, "and the labourer is worthy of his hire." I bid you go without provision for the way, to take neither purse nor scrip, neither store beforehand, nor means to buy. But be not afraid, neither let your hearts be troubled. The same Providence that watches over the tiny sparrows, that scatters each grain and seed in its path, and suffers not one to fall till his fiat be gone forth, will watch over you. "The God that feeds his sparrows, will never starve his child;" and though your path must be in the midst of foes and persecutors, and whosoever killeth you will think that he is doing God service, yet even thus, "Fear them not; for the very hairs of your head are all numbered." And He closes the whole with the encouraging assurance, that He would look upon and accept every act of kindness done to them, for his sake, as if done to Himself; that the humblest evidence of good-will, though but a cup of cold water to a weary and thirsty traveller, should not be unrewarded.

When the scribe, in a preceding chapter, said to Jesus, "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest, or whithersoever thou sendest

me," he thought only of the honours of the embassy; but we now know that not only the twelve apostles, and the disciples of that day, but that every one who is enlisted under the banner of Christ, if he would be worthy of Him, must not only endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, but he must "deny himself, and take up his cross daily," "looking unto Jesus" as his pattern, who "himself endured the cross, despising the shame."

SECTION XXXIV.

(Chapter xi. verses 1—20.)

I DO not know whether John sent this inquiry to Jesus from any wavering in his own mind, or to satisfy the scruples and remove the doubts of his own followers and disciples. Both causes have been suggested; and however much one could wish to think otherwise, and however much may undoubtedly be urged for a contrary opinion, I am inclined to think that for a moment John's faith had failed, not as to the fact itself that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, for to that he had both received and borne undoubted testimony; for "John bare record, saying, *I saw* the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see

the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." John had been now for some time in prison; and prison hours are weary hours, and prison thoughts are melancholy thoughts, and temptations and doubts might assail even this holy man of God in his solitude and weariness. One may lament that it should be so; but knowing that John, like ourselves, was but flesh and blood, and that times of sore trial are permitted of God to purify our faith, even by disclosing its weakness in itself, there may be truth in the supposition that for a moment John's faith had failed, and that though he could not doubt that Jesus was the Son of God, he might be tempted to suppose that the time of his showing openly unto Israel was not yet come, and that they had yet to look for another and a later manifestation of deliverance. It might be, that John had imbibed somewhat of the notions which prevailed even among Jesus' own followers, that He would at this time restore the kingdom to Israel; and hearing, as it is expressly said he did, of the wonderful works that Jesus was performing in every town and village, he might have daily anticipated, as he mused in his lonely cell, some immediate manifestation of the restorer and deliverer of Israel; and "hope delayed" might for the moment have "made his heart sick." Nor is it, perhaps, without significance, that it is said that John sent the

message, and to John, by name, is the answer given, "Go and tell John," while the close of the reply seems more pointedly to refer to John himself than the messengers he sent.

But be this as it may, the reply of Jesus was most emphatic and convincing, far more than if he had replied in the words he did use to the woman of Samaria, "I, that speak unto thee, am He." It was convincing them, by their own senses and their own reasonings; for, calling around Him the blind, and the lame, and the diseased that ever followed in his train, waiting for the word or the touch to heal, "he cured many of their infirmities, and plagues, and evil spirits, and unto many that were blind he gave sight;" and then bade the disciples of John "Go and tell their master what things they had both heard and seen." It is as if He had said, Is it not written in your own prophets of him that cometh, and for whom you ask, that when he cometh, "the eyes of the blind shall see," and behold "the blind receive their sight"? Is it not foretold, that "the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped," and behold "the deaf hear"? Is it not declared, that "in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert," and lo! "the poor have the gospel preached unto them"? Go, then, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; and add also, for his support and encouragement, as well as warning, in his hour of trial, that "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me;" who de-

duces not from present appearances of poverty, meanness, or delay, inferences against my mission or my attributes.

Our Lord then takes advantage of this mission to dilate on John's character and appearance among them, and to recall to those who had heard him the faithful preaching and the consistent life of him, whose voice was now silent among them. It is well to be reminded of the privileges we have enjoyed, and to examine ourselves as to the use we have made of them. It is a solemn question, and may well be put to ourselves, "What went ye out for to see?" What motives led, and in what character have we gone to the house of God? Was it as guilty criminals and needy beggars, craving forgiveness and soliciting alms; or as critics, to sit in judgment on him that ministered, and to cavil at the doctrine he delivered? It is well, too, to be reminded, that privileges are among the talents given, and of which account will be taken. It is not enough that we go to hear; it is far less that we call ourselves by a name; that one saith, "I am of Paul;" and another, "I am of Cephas;" and another, "And I of Apollos." When John came, Jerusalem and all Judea, and the region round about Jordan, and scribes and Pharisees, flocked to his preaching and his baptism; but for what end? what went they out for to see? with what impression did they return? and what report did they bring of the preacher? His plainness and self-denying

habits offended them, his truths were irksome, his doctrines too searching, and they said, "He hath a devil." Yet, lowly as John was in their eyes, and still lowlier in his own, his character is recorded in God's own book on earth, as uttered by One who could not err, that among them that are born of women, there had not risen a greater than John the Baptist. His name, too, is recorded on high, in the Lamb's Book of Life; and though once inferior to the least in heaven, he is now high amid that glorious band, "the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven."

SECTION XXXV.

(Chapter xi. verse 20 to the end.)

I SAID before, that it was well to be reminded of the privileges we have enjoyed, and the use we have made of them. The Jews not only had the preaching of John, but they had also the ministry of Jesus, and, in the towns of Galilee especially, had that ministry been mostly exercised. Our Lord, reflecting on all that He had taught and done in these their cities, is here moved with the deepest compassion at their hardened rejection of his message. The same feelings that afterwards drew tears from his eyes, as He gazed upon the doomed Jerusalem, now moved Him to tenderest pity for these cities, where He had so long resided,

and so long laboured. The language of Jesus here is not the denunciation of destruction, nor the prophetic utterance of a woe—it is rather the intense expression of his sorrow that he has laboured in vain among them. "Woe is thee," or, "Alas for thee, Chorazin!" "Alas for thee, Bethsaida!" But are Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum the only cities; are the inhabitants of those places the only individuals, over whom Jesus sees cause to mourn? Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon, though no doubt guilty cities, and most justly objects of God's wrath and righteous retribution, had yet never had the privileges which these cities of Galilee possessed. No Saviour had ever trod their streets, no prophet even had been sent to call them to repentance. Had it been so, had a messenger from God come among them, as Jonah did at Nineveh, they too, like the Ninevites, might have repented in sackcloth and ashes, and the devoted cities of the plain have remained to this day memorials of the Lord's sparing mercy, rather than monuments of his awful justice. And are our own privileges less scanty than those of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum? Are we less favoured than they? I believe that if the Saviour were now on earth—were he traversing our land, as he did that of Judea and Galilee—were he now looking on guilty London, as he did on guilty Jerusalem—were he even looking on this narrow spot of ground on which we live, and on the inhabitants

of our own neighbourhood—He might indeed say with equal truth, and equal sorrow and compassion, as he turned from one to the other, "Alas, for thee! and alas, for thee! for if the privileges vouchsafed to you, had been vouchsafed to Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, even they *might*, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." It is true, Jesus lived among them; it is true that he preached in their synagogues, and healed in their streets; but he was on earth "of no reputation." Long prejudices—the prejudices of their nation, their education, their Mosaic ritual, their very religion, their rulers, their teachers, the very scribes and expounders of their law, were all against the lowly Jesus. His very birth and residence among them; his daily walk and mingling in their companies, however it may have led them to regard him as a teacher sent from God, must, in a measure, have blinded the majority to his claim to be the Son of God. They knew him as the carpenter's son, and could not recognise Jehovah in the man of sorrows that walked their streets. The veil was indeed upon their hearts. It is not so with us. We have been born in a Christian land; we have had Christian parents; our earliest lessons were to lisp the name of Jesus with reverence and love; every habit, every association, and every service is blended with the thought of Jesus. He is indeed very nigh to every one of us; in His name we meet in our public and our social

worship, and in His name we close every prayer. His word is in every house, the acknowledged charter of our birthright, and the inspired exponent of His will. Are we living up to these *our* privileges? Are we walking according to *our* light; or are we walking still in darkness? The awful lesson taught us in this passage of Scripture is, that filthy as Sodom and Gomorrah were, and idolatrous and guilty as Tyre and Sidon were, their privileges and their light were infinitely less than those of these cities of Galilee, yet God condemned them with a most righteous overthrow, as "an example unto those that should after live ungodly." The privileges and advantages which Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum had, were immeasurably inferior to those under which we live; yet woe was unto them, because they lived not up to the light they had. The inference is plain but fearful, that if darkened Sodom and Gomorrah were so signally visited; if Tyre and Sidon were swept with the besom of destruction, because they knew not God; and if these cities of Galilee were blotted out from the map of the world, because, though Jesus walked among them, they knew Him not as God; what must be our righteous doom, who live in the full light of gospel truth, and yet walk as if in darkness! Abused privileges form the most fearful item in God's account, whether as regards nations or individuals.

SECTION XXXVI.

(Chapter xii. verses 1—21.)

IT is well for us that we have a Teacher whose instruction cannot mislead, and who at the same time so well knoweth whereof we are made, that his lovingkindness will never overload. When man attempts to guide or define the duties of his fellow-men in spiritual matters, it is like the blind leading the blind—he is sure either to overdo, or underdo—to lay too heavy a burden on man's shoulders, or to relax altogether the obligations of God's law. It is equally dangerous, too, to trust to ourselves in this matter. We are, as an old writer once observed, "bad carvers" for ourselves; and as self would generally predominate, we should gradually—even, perhaps, with the best intentions—diminish what we might call the strictness of Sabbath institutions, under the plea of Christian liberty, till every fence was thrown down, and pleasure, and business, and worldly associates and engagements, and every variety of interruption, would be suffered to break in without check or restraint, and the Sabbath be utterly lost to us.

I do not imagine that there are many, in reality, who seriously deny the obligation of the Sabbath day, or who, if you come to close reasoning with them on the subject, would avowedly maintain its abrogation, or look upon it as merely of political

expediency, or as sanctioned chiefly by considerations of humanity. And it would be unnecessary for us who do acknowledge the Sabbath to enter on any such question. But it may be desirable to look a little more closely into that law of liberty which is here laid down by our Lord, as relaxing that strict severity, and that heavy burden which Jewish tradition and Pharisaic formality had heaped upon the Sabbath day. The incident which gives rise to the discussion was as follows:—Our Lord was going through a corn-field on the Sabbath day, and his disciples being an hungred, plucked some of the ears of corn, and began to eat them. One might have thought that the remonstrance of the Pharisees would have been against the act, as a wrong to the owner of the corn; but the act was permitted by the law of Moses: "When thou comest unto thy neighbour's standing corn, thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand"—and, accordingly, the Pharisees confine their censures to the act being done on the Sabbath day. "Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day." It was considered as somewhat of an act of reaping; and as all servile work and works of labour were prohibited on the Sabbath, the Pharisees denounced this as included in the prohibition, even though done to satisfy the cravings of hunger. Jesus justifies the act by alluding to a somewhat similar instance in the life of David. When escaping for his life

from the hands of Saul, he and his followers came to Abimelech the priest, and requested food in their distress. There was no food at hand, save only the twelve loaves of the shew-bread, which, after being offered up to God, were deemed consecrated, and appropriated to the priests alone to eat. But the emergency of David's distress was supposed to justify the act of giving them to him, and neither David nor his followers were ever considered guilty before God; nor Abimelech himself, for giving mercy the preference over a mere ceremonial rite. Saul, it is true, put him to death for the act; but the crime charged was aiding the king's enemy, not profaning the Lord's shew-bread. Jesus then adduces another justification, even more striking and convincing, because still practised by their own priests, and in full accordance with their own ritual: If the performance of *any* work on the Sabbath is a profanation of its holy character, then your own priests in the temple profane it, for they offer victims in sacrifice on that day, because God's service requires it, and are yet held blameless. As, then, in David's case humanity and mercy justified a deviation from the strict letter of the law, so, in the latter case, of the priest's killing the victims for the altar, God's service, and the worship of the temple, equally justified the act. Surely, then, our Lord proceeds to argue, if *they* justified and held their priests blameless for such an act on the Sabbath

day—if the sanctity and authority of the temple threw a religious and sacred character over the transaction, He who was greater than the temple—He to whom the temple was dedicated—He who had made and appointed the Sabbath, and claimed to himself the title of "Lord of the Sabbath,"—He might justify and hold blameless his own servants for an act done in his service, and to satisfy the cravings of hunger. The rule here laid down, then, is, that works of humanity and kindness, and works of necessity,—whatever, in the occupations of the Sabbath day, is done in the service and for the glory of God, and in the service and for the good of our fellow-creatures, may be, and is, perfectly consistent with the religious observance and sacred character of the day. By one of those spiritual paradoxes, which every child of God knows by his own experience to be so sweetly true, when he is most free, he is most bound; and the law of Christian liberty, in which he rejoices, is that which keeps him closest to God and allows of no wandering from Him.

SECTION XXXVII.

(Chapter xii. verses 22—28.)

We have here another instance of Christ's power over unclean spirits. It is a melancholy evidence of the malice of him that would hold us in bondage; and though, blessed be God, his

power over the bodies of men is mercifully restrained, and even his power over our souls is limited, yet this unhappy being is another representative of our fallen and pitiable condition. "Possessed of a devil," "blind," and "dumb." I do not know whether his being dumb was attended with the privation of hearing also, as is so generally the case; but, even without that additional calamity, his condition was miserable enough;—and miserable indeed the sinner whom his case depicts. Possessed of a devil, given up to the unrestrained indulgence of every appetite and passion, and hurried onwards by ungovernable impulse in a career of profligacy and vice; blind, too, utterly incapable of seeing whither his course leads; blind to the things of God and his own peace; blind to the destruction that yawns before him, and rushing madly to his ruin, "as an ox goeth to the slaughter;" and, if deprived of hearing, deaf to every remonstrance, to the voice of friends, or relatives, or minister; deaf, too, to the voice of God and his Holy Spirit,—and, as the saddest climax of all, *dumb*—not a word of prayer passing his lips, not an ejaculation for mercy, like that of the poor publican,—but voiceless, wordless, prayerless, and, we might almost have added, hopeless too, but for this Gospel of St. Matthew, which tells us that there was healing even for this unhappy being, thus heavily afflicted, through the mercy of Jesus, and so, too, for the vilest sinner, however crimson the dye, however

scarlet the stain of his sins, however hopeless, helpless, and prayerless in himself, there is likewise mercy through the same Saviour. Even in this view of the miracle there is a vast field of remark and consolation to ourselves; but it is chiefly as connected with what follows, that the most important interest of this miracle arises.

The people—devoid of prejudice, and influenced by no envious or malicious suggestions, but giving utterance to the natural feelings of their hearts at the sight of such an act of mercy; seeing this once miserable object gazing with recovered sight on his benefactor, and hearing, instead of blasphemies, the accents of gratitude and adoration from his loosened tongue—exclaimed at once, "Is not this the Son of David?"—that is, the Christ that should come into the world? But the Pharisees, galled by the miracle which they could not deny, and stung by the adoring acknowledgment of the people, blasphemously, though senselessly, imputed the act to a collusion with the evil spirit himself. The miracle they could not, they did not attempt to deny—it was too open, too evident, and there were too many witnesses. But what they could not deny, they would pervert; and, therefore, in their blind malice, as if almost to illustrate, in their own persons, the case of the poor demoniac whom Jesus had just healed, they recklessly declare that the prince of the devils was the agent, and Jesus the instrument of the miracle. Our Lord,

indeed, for the sake of those around Him, condescended to refute so preposterous an assertion, by showing what a suicidal act, on the part of Satan, such a collusion would be, and how their own convictions, their very senses, gave the lie to such a charge; that every act of his own life, every miracle He had wrought, and every precept He had delivered, was to undermine the power of Satan, and destroy his kingdom; that though Satan was strong, there was One stronger still; that, though the prince of the devils, the Spirit of the Lord should lift up a standard against him, and prevail. The inference was plain, that if Christ, by the Spirit of God, cast out devils, then was the kingdom of God come unto them; that if Satan was himself bound, and his goods spoiled, then He that triumphed over him could be in no league with him.

It was this blasphemous assertion of the Pharisees which gave rise to the solemn and awful declaration of our Lord, that, though there was mercy and forgiveness for every other sin, there was, there could be, none for the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. This declaration, so appalling in its language, so fearful in its sentence, and so irrevocable in its execution, has given sorrow, and distress, and despondency, if not despair, to many a wounded spirit; and not a few have gone mourning all their days, as if they had incurred the penalty of the unpardonable sin. I would say, however, that this passage is

not so much a denunciation of unmitigated wrath, as a warning, in mercy, lest an unhappy soul should incur so irreversible a sentence. Even as regards these Pharisees, who had approached so nearly the confines of the sin, even on them no doom is passed; and in the parallel passage of St. Mark, the latter clause defines the meaning of the preceding, "hath never forgiveness, but *is in danger of* eternal damnation." These Pharisees had consciously blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts against the Saviour. Their own reasonings, had they given them fair play, would have led to the same conclusion with Nicodemus, "No man can do these miracles that thou doest, unless God be with him;" or, with the blind man, "that if this man were not of God, he could do nothing." They resisted their conviction, and, though they knew and felt the contrary, blasphemously imputed to the agency of the devil that which the Spirit of God Himself had wrought. Yet even their day of grace was not yet passed; even for them was mercy held out, though they were "in danger of eternal damnation,"—in danger of hardening their hearts against the truth, and being destroyed suddenly, and that without remedy. There was yet to be the more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost; in fact, the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified. But if that dispensation of mercy passed unheeded—if they still held up a veil against that

blaze of noonday light, and continued even then to ascribe to diabolical agency the operations of the Holy Ghost, there would be, there could be, no more opening for mercy—no more calls to repentance. The Spirit Himself would cease to strive; God Himself, in His righteous anger, would say, "Let them alone; my Spirit shall not alway strive with them." And if the Spirit be withdrawn, who shall convince of sin? who shall take of the things of Jesus, and show them unto us? who shall make intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered? "It is impossible," says the apostle, using the very spirit of his Lord's language, "it is impossible to renew them." And why? Not because God's mercy is limited; not because the blood of Jesus cleanseth not from all sin; but because this sin closes the only door through which mercy could enter, and blocks up the only avenue by which access could be gained to an offended God. "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation."

I am not prepared to say that this sin could *by no possibility* be incurred in the present day; but it must include such a variety of offences, and such a combination of particulars, as are not likely to meet in the same individual; and most assuredly he who fears that he may through inadvertence have fallen into this perilous sin, and whose smitten conscience accuses him and

causes him to go heavily in consequence, may at once dismiss his fears. Inadvertence has no place in the sin: it is rather daring, open, avowed defiance; sorrow for sin is no consequent: it is rather, reckless, callous, hardened indifference. But yet, it holds out to us all a solemn and fearful warning not to trifle with convictions; there is a tampering with conscience which may go too far, and there is a hardened continuance in sin which may equally induce that most fearful of all sentences—"Let him alone; he that is unjust let him be unjust still; he that is filthy let him be filthy still." And God's Spirit may as thoroughly and entirely withdraw from the hardened profligate, as from the blasphemous reviler.

SECTION XXXVIII.

(Chapter xii. verse 28 to the end.)

Our Lord had said, in his sermon on the mount, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find;" but he never meant to imply that everything that man in his caprice could ask, should be granted to his request. In all God's promises there is a limitation, that our requests be not hurtful to ourselves, and that they be conducive to His glory. If otherwise, we cannot expect that God will either hear or answer us. The apostle tells us that the reason we ask and receive not is, because we ask amiss. There could

hardly be a more preposterous request than that recorded here, "Master, we would see a sign from thee." What! had they not had sign upon sign? Might not our Lord have answered, in the very words He had replied to the Baptist's message, "Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up." Might He not have pointed to the man whom he had just healed—possessed with a devil, blind and dumb—and said, "Behold my credentials!" Did they expect the prophecy of Daniel at that moment to be fulfilled at their behest, and to see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven? There had been abundance of testimony to the reality of Christ's mission; a voice from heaven had proclaimed him God's beloved Son, the Holy Spirit had visibly descended on him, and from that hour his whole life had been a series of continued miracle. Every town, and village, and district had witnessed them, and one of their own body, a Pharisee himself, had declared, in the conviction of his heart, "No man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." It was only as an excuse for their unbelief and hardened rejection of Christ, that they now demanded another sign. Its effects, we know, would have been the same, as our Lord himself declared in the parable of the Rich

man and Lazarus, "Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent;" "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

The very sign which the rich man so earnestly desired for his brethren was vouchsafed to the Jews, and the very sign which our Lord declares should alone be granted,—the sign of the prophet Jonah, whose burial in the whale's belly so aptly represented our Lord's burial in the grave, and whose coming forth typified our Lord's resurrection from the dead. The Ninevites had no doubt heard of Jonah's miraculous deliverance from the storm and the monster, and were prepared to receive him as one sent from God, and they accordingly repented, and were spared. Jesus, too, arose from his temporary grave, but the nation of the Jews rejected His credentials; and though they might have remembered his words, and his appeal to the sign of the prophet Jonah, and though they knew how truly and literally it was fulfilled in his own resurrection, "neither would they be persuaded, though" He actually "rose from the dead."

How truly, then, was this parable of the unclean spirit departing for a season from its wonted abode, and returning after a time with far increased power, awfully and fearfully verified in the case of the Jewish nation! When John the Baptist first appeared in the wilderness, saying,

"The kingdom of heaven is at hand; prepare ye the way of the Lord," there flocked to him numbers from Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him, confessing their sins. When Jesus himself began His ministry, multitudes on every side hung upon his steps, and as they saw his miracles, glorified God, who had given such power unto men, and would have taken him by force and made him their king. The power of Satan for a time was shaken and disturbed; Satan, like lightning, seemed to fall from heaven; and, for a brief season, it might have been almost true what the chief priests said in their fear, "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him." The "unclean spirit" had departed for a season. But had he not "returned, and brought with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself," when this same Jewish people cried out, "Away with him, away with him," "Crucify him, crucify him;" and with diabolical infatuation, exclaimed, "His blood be on us, and on our children?" And when in the last days the whole malice of hell seemed poured out on their devoted city and nation, was not their "last state worse than the first"?

Let us remember, for our warning, that *conviction* is not *conversion*, and *partial reformation* is not *repentance*. The change required is "a new creature," "faith working by love," and "keeping the commandments of God."

SECTION XXXIX.

(Chapter xiii. verses 1—24.)

THIS parable of the Sower stands first in the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in which it is recorded; and there is at least a very evident fitness for this priority in the subject on which it treats. It is at the head of that beautiful and instructive series of parables or figurative stories, which our Lord so constantly adopted as channels of instruction; and this one of the Sower may have been selected to represent, as it certainly does represent, the various classes of hearers to whom these allegories, or simple narratives, were addressed; and the four classes into which they are divided seem with melancholy accuracy to mark out the different descriptions of hearers, and the impressions with which they may be supposed to have heard the truths addressed to them,—those who paid no attention whatsoever,—those who at the time were moved and struck by their force and beauty, but almost instantly forgot them,—those, too, who retained them for a time, and seemed to be desirous to act up to their full extent and purpose; who appeared to be growing in grace and in knowledge, but whose impressions gradually became weaker and weaker, till they were finally choked and destroyed amid the pleasures and vanities, or the cares and anxieties, of life;

and finally, those who, in an honest and good heart, were unfeignedly anxious, and took every pains that the seed sown should not be lost, but should spring up into everlasting life.

We shall have other opportunities of discussing these distinctive classes of hearers; and I would therefore, at present, merely observe, that this mode of instruction by parables, or fictitious stories, which render the representation of outward and natural objects more forcibly, which bring before us spiritual and less palpable matters, and which, by comparing things unseen by things seen, impress them more strongly as well as more pleasingly on the mind's eye, was very common, as they are to this day, in the countries of the East, and we find a variety of them in the Old Testament. We all remember, for instance, Nathan's touching parable of the poor man's ewe-lamb, which lay in his bosom and was unto him as a daughter,—how beautifully, how aptly, it represented every feature of David's sin; and yet, with what art its point was concealed, till the monarch had so unconsciously passed sentence on himself. *We* are so accustomed, in reading these various parables, to read the explanation at the same time, and they appear to us so easy of development, that one almost wonders how any could mistake their meaning, or not detect their purport with every word that was uttered. But this was far from being the case. David had not the slightest idea that his guilt

was sketched under the character of the rich man with many flocks and herds; he never dreamed that the poor man with the one ewe-lamb was Uriah the Hittite, or that the lamb so cruelly torn from him was the wife of his bosom, till the astounding declaration, "Thou art the man," came like a peal of thunder on his conscience. So here we find the disciples saying to Jesus, "Declare unto us the parable of the sower," or, "Declare unto us the parable of the tares;" and St. Mark expressly tells us, that "when they were alone, Jesus expounded" all his parables to his disciples.

The question, however, may very naturally occur to us, as it did to the disciples, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?"—why deliver such solemn and important truths under the mystery of parables? As regards the people at large, "I speak unto them in parables, because they, seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand." It was to verify the declaration of the prophet, who had foretold of this people, that they would see without perceiving, and hear without understanding, and would obstinately persist in their blindness and hardness of heart, even in the very midst of his instructions and his teaching. It is another fearful warning against the abuse of privileges, as well as ample encouragement to turn them to good account—"Whosoever hath,"—whosoever hath made a profitable use

of what has been hitherto assigned him, to him shall more be given, and he shall abound in all knowledge; and "Whosoever hath not,"—whosoever does not turn to a profitable and spiritual account his various privileges, his powers of mind, and opportunities allotted to him, shall forfeit, if not the actual possession, at least all advantage from them. It is not without especial significance that Jesus closes this parable, so descriptive of the various classes of hearers, with the solemn warning, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear;" nor should we forget, that however others may possess ampler privileges than ourselves, we at least have "ears to hear," and should "take heed how we hear."

SECTION XL.

(Chapter xiii. verses 24—44.)

It had often been a question among philosophers of old, and perhaps even at the present day a question may at times arise in a man's heart, "How evil came into the world." And I have no doubt, that, especially in seasons of sore trial, it does perplex many an honest inquirer, why God, the God of love and mercy, should permit so much of sin and evil, so much of suffering and sorrow, so much of all that can render life miserable, to be entailed on his creatures. We read in the first chapter of

Genesis, that as each portion of the world was brought into being, as the process of each day's creation was moulded into shape and form, and passed, as it were, in review before its Creator, God pronounced it "good;" and at the close of the six days' work, when all was completed, God looked upon "every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." Yet how soon was the fair impress of Almighty goodness obliterated; how soon was the Creator's image effaced, and every species of wrong and outrage, of cruelty and suffering, of pain and death, brought into the world! Had the Eternal changed his mind? "I change not," is His declaration of Himself. Had there arisen another being of superior or equal power, who had overthrown the Almighty's purposes, and converted his world of beauty into deformity, his beneficence and good into evil? "Ye are my witnesses," saith the Lord, "Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God, I know not any." And yet *there was* another being, an enemy, an enemy to God and man, whose hand and malice perpetrated the mischief; and that enemy is the devil.

In one sense, indeed, God is the inflictor of evil; and with the humble acquiescence of Job we submissively ask, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" And the Lord himself declares, by the mouth of His prophet, "I make peace and create evil," and asks, "Shall there be evil in a city, and

the Lord hath not done it?" But this is penal evil, this is the punishment of sin,—the righteous award of the Judge,—what we have deserved at the hands of the Almighty. God indeed made everything very good, but the enemy was soon at hand to undermine and destroy his gracious work. The Almighty foresaw and permitted the ruin of his own work, and, even before creation, had provided the gracious remedy. God was not taken by surprise; the enemy stole not upon the outworks or the citadel, unknown to Him who had placed man there; it is not said, "While God slept, an enemy came," but while man slept, he stole in and sowed his pernicious seed; and God's glory was magnified, God's justice was proclaimed, and God's mercy triumphant, in that, out of such a ruin, and such a wreck, He has wrought out and brought in so mighty a deliverance, so glorious a salvation.

The question, however, which this parable of the Tares more immediately brings before us, is, not how evil came into the world, but why evil is permitted to rage so rampantly, and triumph so openly as it often does; why wicked men are suffered to go on in their wickedness, to the injury of God's own people, and to the increase of the world's suffering, when the Almighty, by the word of His power, could at once destroy and remove them out of the way; and we often, in our shortsightedness, wonder at the Lord's forbearance. I am afraid, that, in many an

instance, if the Almighty delegated his power to man, we could not endure for a moment that contradiction of sinners against ourselves, which He endures continually; we soon get wearied even with a brother's provocations, or a child's offences, forgetting our own unnumbered provocations against the long-suffering of God, and that He, though "provoked every day," is never weary, never worn out. Like the disciples of our Lord, "not knowing what manner of spirit we were of," we should be too ready to call down fire from heaven on every offender's head. The servants of the householder in this parable are represented as desirous only to root out the weeds and the tares; and the reply of our Lord to this natural inquiry is at once the answer to our perplexities, "Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest." How much of tenderness, as well as of long-suffering in the dispensation—of long-suffering to the wicked, as of tenderness to the righteous—having no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and not willing to peril even the slightest interest or good of his own children! If forbearance be in vain, be not impatient; there is a day of separation, of final separation, when all God's ways shall be vindicated, and all His dealings justified.

SECTION XLI.

(Chapter xiii. verse 44 to the end.)

THE belief which we give to any good tidings that may be brought us, must be in a great measure dependent on the confidence we have in the person who brings the intelligence, his means of information, and the truthfulness of his character. There has been a good deal of late reported of the wonderful discoveries of gold in certain countries. When the discovery was first announced, it was generally received with distrust; but no sooner was it known as a truth that there was "treasure hid in a field," that the rivers, and the mountains, and the valleys of certain districts abounded in that mineral, which man has coveted more than every treasure, and for the possession even of a small portion of which he has perilled every hope for time and for eternity,—no sooner, I say, was the rumour ascertained to be true, that each man, for himself, might secure and realize a mass of gold, than all the world was in a ferment, and men of every class and condition forsook all that they had, and went in search of this "hid treasure." And there they are at this moment, encountering hardships, and perils, and privations, making "gold their hope," and saying to fine gold, "Thou art my confidence." And yet, even amid the abundance of the treasure, which no doubt does exist, how often has it eluded their

grasp, and ended in disappointment! how many a gold-seeker has perished in his search, and sunk beneath the hardships of his way! how many have lost health and strength in their labours, and returned home with shattered constitutions and embittered hopes! how many have had their gains snatched from them by violence and wrong, and lost their very lives, because they were known to be the possessors of gold! In a word, up to the present time at least, the discovery has let loose all the fiercer and grosser passions of our nature; hounded, as it were, man upon his fellow-man, and been the cause of more misery, wrong, and outrage, than any event since the discovery of the new world. Such has been, and such are, man's doings on the announcement of the "treasure hid" in Californian and Australian fields.

It is now upwards of 1800 years ago, since a man appeared in Judea, proclaiming tidings before which all earthly hopes sink into nothing; announcing a treasure, which eye had never yet seen, nor ear heard of, nor of which could the human heart conceive. He, too, describes it as "treasure hid in a field;" as a treasure, however, which all may find who seek, and all may gain who ask. He describes it as a pearl more precious than those found in the caskets or set in the crowns of princes. He came with every credential that could give security to the message, or confidence in the messenger. His tidings were proclaimed

by angels from heaven as "tidings of great joy"—the Spirit of God visibly descended on Him, and a voice from out of heaven proclaimed Him God's beloved Son. The very spirits of hell acknowledged their conqueror and tormentor; and yet, how was he received by man? how was his message credited and accepted by the very race to whom he came to announce such a glorious discovery, the "hid treasure of his gospel," the "pearl of great price," the "unsearchable riches of Christ"? We have an instance at the close of this very chapter, how one city received him, how they scorned his message, and reviled his person. Jesus "came unto his own, and his own received him not." And how is His message received now? Are persons, even at the present day, acting as if they really believed the report which had reached them of "a better country," of "a heavenly inheritance," of "greater riches than the treasures in Egypt," of "treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust do corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal"? May we not, even at this day, and in this land, say with the prophet of old, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" There is not that stirring among the people, that heaving amid the dead bones, that restless excitement and eager expectation with which men listen to some wondrous tidings, of which they long to believe the truth; there is no girding up of the loins, and readiness to start in the race; no preparedness to set forth, and make

every sacrifice to become sharers in the spoil, to count all things but loss, so that they may win Christ; to sell all that they have to buy the field, and become the owners of the pearl. And yet it is a treasure, in which all may share without money and without price; it is not like earthly treasure, of which the more one gets, the less another has; it is not like the contest of the Isthmian or Olympic race, in which all run, but one only receiveth the prize. The treasure is in a mine that is never exhausted, never diminished; —for "we were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

SECTION XLII.

(Chapter xiv. verses 1—13.)

We have here a remarkable example of the power of conscience upon a guilty man. Herod, the son of that Herod the Great who had put the children of Bethlehem to death, had followed in his father's steps, and, shortly before this period, had put John the Baptist to death. He hears of the wondrous works not only of Jesus himself, but of his disciples who had been sent out on their mission through Judea and Galilee; and what is the impression made upon his mind by the rumours that he hears? what is the con-

fession extorted from his lips?—not that *He* had come of whom John testified, not that John's mission as his forerunner had been abundantly fulfilled and verified in him, that should, and now had, come after him—but his conscience-stricken confession was that John himself, though beheaded and buried, had arisen from the dead, and returned to earth: "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead." Now such a supposition, from the lips of any other man, might not have been so inappropriate, for the Jewish Scriptures told of some who had been raised to life from the dead; and amid a vast number of the Jews it was not "thought a thing incredible that God should raise the dead." But Herod was a Sadducee, and the Sadducees denied the resurrection. And yet Herod, in his terror and consternation, throws at once to the winds all his scepticism and infidelity, and confesses that there is such a truth as the resurrection from the dead. And I would just remark on this, that however men may for a time reject the evidences of God's Word and truth; however they may profess to throw off the restraint of religion, or, as they might call it, be free from the prejudices of superstition, and, while all is fair and serene around them, be bold enough in their scoffs at religion; yet an hour will come when truth will be heard, and conscience whisper the fatal delusion in which they have lived, and the lie in their right hand which Satan has bound there. Herod was an unbeliever, and yet Herod

in his panic stammered forth his conviction that his creed was a lie. Depend upon it, it requires something far more real and substantial to stand the searching siftings of a dying hour, and an awakened conscience. When a "judgment to come" is presented to the startled sight, it is not Felix alone that trembles.

To return, however, to the narrative of John's murder. We had a short time ago an account of John sending a message to Jesus. At that time the Baptist had been long in prison, and that imprisonment we now find ending in a violent and bloody death. To the eye of sense, to the outward gaze, John's life would appear to have been but madness and folly, or at best an enthusiast's dream abruptly broken by the headsman's axe. In his own words we might say, he was "a voice,"—"nothing but a voice, a sound, that as soon as it has expressed the thought of which it is the sign, dies into air, and is heard no more."* A few short months of energetic preaching in the wilderness, a brief period of apparently popular acceptance, and then imprisoned and forsaken by all save a few timid and heart-broken followers, and in the end prematurely put to death by a bloody tyrant, to gratify the vengeance of a profligate adulteress, and to fulfil an inadvertent oath to a vain girl. The whole series of circumstances with which the birth of John was ushered in, seemed to prefigure a career of peculiar import-

* Fenelon.

ance and consideration. Predicted by prophets, announced by an angel, and accomplished and accompanied by miracle, surely his birth must be the commencement of a course consistent with the character of him of whom, at his birth, his father declared, "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways." And yet, from that hour, not a word is related of him till he was thirty years of age, save that "he was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel." And yet it was of this John that our Lord himself declared, "Verily I say unto you, of them that are born of women, there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist." He had executed the commission intrusted to him; he had fulfilled his ministry, and done the work given him to do; and can that life be called short which has done its work—which has completed its mission? or that death be considered premature which heralded its summons with the glad announcement, "Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord"? It was at the close of nearly thirty years of laborious and painful service, that Paul humbly but gratefully said of himself, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course: I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord,

the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." John, though at the close of a far briefer period of service, might equally have said the same. It is the Lord of the vineyard who appoints the service, assigns the limits, and closes the labour; and as the householder equally rewarded those who were called at the later as at the earlier hours of the day, so is it the same tender and compassionate Master who recalls some home at noon, and retains others in his work till the evening closes, and the night cometh. It is not so much length of service, as fidelity in our work, that God regards; and happy are we, if when God calls us, whether at even, or at midnight, or in the morning, he shall find us watching, waiting, and working also.

SECTION XLIII.

(Chapter xiv. verses 13—21.)

You remember how our Lord, in his sermon on the mount, had said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these" —all necessary—"things shall be added unto you;" and we have here a most gracious and wonderful instance of the fulfilment of His own words. At the close of this miraculous banquet, he might have quoted His own words, and added, "This day has this promise been fulfilled in your eyes." Jesus had retired, on the intelligence of the death of John, to a desert place, out of

Herod's jurisdiction, partly perhaps by way of security, as well as to avoid all occasion of umbrage or offence. Yet even to this solitude the people flocked in vast multitudes, crowding, from all the neighbouring towns and villages, on foot to Jesus; and with that compassion which permitted himself no rest, He went forth to them, and healed all their sick. As evening drew on, and the crowd showed no symptoms of returning home, and as they had now been all the day without food, his disciples, more considerate for their Master than compassionate for their fellow-creatures, would have had Jesus dismiss them to their homes. But how gracious His words! "They need not depart." Did any hungering and thirsting soul ever come to Christ and was rejected of Him? Did any oppressed, and burdened, and sin-condemned one ever seek Jesus, and was told to go away, unrefreshed and unrelieved? Man might, in his blindness and ignorance, or in his pride and self-righteousness, bid him go away and stand afar off; but Jesus says to every sorrowing one, to every burdened one, and every sin-stricken penitent, "Ye need not depart." "Come unto me, *all* ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Ho, *every one* that thirsteth, come." "Ye need not depart." "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." Even while yet afar off, the Father will see his feeble, tottering steps, and will Himself run to meet him, and fall on his neck, and kiss him.

What encouragement to the poor, timid comer to Christ! What a touching rebuke to those that keep away from Him! and how significantly might the words be applied to many in our congregations, on sacramental days, when they rise up to depart, as if there were no provision, no welcome for them! "Ye need not depart;" I am here on purpose to welcome and receive you. All things are ready. Come, eat and drink, without money and without price.

Do we doubt the abundance of the feast? No contrast could be possibly so great as between the provisions here at hand, and the numbers among whom they were distributed. Five barley *loaves*, or, as we might perhaps more truly describe them, five barley *biscuits*, and two fishes, while the expectant crowds were perhaps ten thousand persons! for there were five thousand men, and we could hardly estimate the women and children at a less number. "Hard" and "easy" are words which have no meaning as applied to God. "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" "Bring them to me!" is the simple command; and then, desiring the people to sit down on the grass, he proceeded to bless the scanty food thus provided for them; and as it is said, "The blessing of the Lord maketh rich," so the blessing of Jesus multiplied these five barley loaves and two small fishes till all had eaten and were filled; and the very fragments exceeded the original quantity. One can well imagine the adoring astonishment,

both of disciples and people, as the miraculous supply passed from the hands of Jesus, and was distributed among them. As band after band, and company after company had enough and to spare, they must indeed have recalled to mind that almighty agency, which in times past had provided bread in the wilderness and quails in the desert for the many thousands of Israel. And yet neither the miraculous supply in the wilderness for forty years, nor this astonishing increase in the neighbourhood of Bethsaida, are the only nor the chief evidences of that boundless love and compassion which is in the heart of Jesus; for He gave Himself the true and the living bread which cometh down from heaven. And oh! how blessed the inference, how cheering the encouragement, which the apostle draws! "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things!"

SECTION XLIV.

(Chapter xiv. verse 22 to the end.)

I SCARCELY know a passage of Scripture from which so many important reflections arise for our own guidance on the stormy sea of life, as the incidents recorded in this portion of the chapter. Let us, however, take up the history from the preceding section.

Jesus had just performed that most astounding creative miracle, of feeding nearly ten thousand people with five barley loaves and two fishes. Matthew is altogether silent as to the effect produced on the minds of those who witnessed this miracle; but we find from St. John that the first impulse of the multitude was to bear Him away by force, and proclaim Him their king. And this throws some light on St. Matthew's silence, who was, no doubt, present, and was well aware of everything that passed; and if he, as well as his brother apostles, as in all probability they did, joined in the rash impulse, it not only explains why he made no allusion to the circumstance, but why it is said that Jesus constrained, or rather compelled, his disciples immediately to embark in a boat without him, while he remained behind to dismiss the multitude. It was, no doubt, in full accordance with that wisdom with which he ever acted, that by constraining his disciples to depart first, He deprived the multitude of leaders, and then, without difficulty, persuaded them to disperse also. It had been, no doubt, a day of much anxiety and exertion to Jesus. He had healed their sick, He had fed their hungry, and, we cannot doubt, He had also instructed the ignorant, and comforted the sorrowing; and the day had closed in resisting their purposes and opposing their friendly violence. But how were the hours of solitude and quiet passed? Were they devoted to that natural rest he needed equally with

the most weary, in seeking that repose which his own exhausted frame required as much as that of any other tired and worn-out labourer? We are told how that night was spent—"He went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone."

There is something too solemn in this communion of the Incarnate Son with his Father in heaven, for us to attempt to draw the veil aside. The Scriptures give us some instances of most beautiful and touching prayer that fell from the Saviour's lips; but this night's communings are hidden from us. He no doubt prayed for those whom he had just dismissed; He no doubt prayed for those toiling on the stormy sea at his command; and during the many hours in which he remained engaged in intercession with his Father, He no doubt prayed for all who should hereafter believe on him. But, in the meanwhile, what had become of the little vessel in which his disciples had set forth, by his directions, to go to the other side? A storm had overtaken them, and the ship, driven by contrary winds, was tossed by the boisterous waves. It was by their Lord's commands they had embarked—it was in their Lord's work they were engaged—and yet difficulties met them, and storm and tempest opposed their progress. It was true then, and it is true now, that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of heaven. Faith must be tried, patience must be exercised, perseverance practised, hardness en-

dured, and all those graces and qualities matured, which complete the perfectly-equipped soldier of Jesus Christ. Opposition is no indication of Christ's withdrawal or desertion. He is with his people as surely on the stormy sea, and amid the midnight darkness, as in the noonday calm. Nor is delay in succouring distress, any evidence that He has forsaken or is indifferent to their cries. From evening till midnight these disciples had battled with the winds and waves, and now the morning was beginning to break on their desponding apprehensions, for it was the fourth watch, or three o'clock, when they discern a figure walking, as it were, on those stormy waves, and drawing nigh to their vessel. At the first glance, and dimly seen through the breaking twilight of the morning, they are alarmed, and cry out for fear. But how instantly do they recognise the well-known and beloved voice of their Lord, speaking peace, and comfort, and joy to their sorrowing hearts: "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." Oh! what a triad of gracious sentences to break in upon a sorrowing hour, a desponding spirit, or an alarmed apprehension! Is there a sorrow, a storm, a darkness, or dread—is there a grief of the heart, or a calamity of life, be it what it may, in which these words of the same gracious and watchful Saviour will not break in upon and dispel the deepest gloom?

Peter, always fervent in feeling, always foremost in the expression of it, now convinced that it was

indeed the Lord, asked permission to go down to Him on those very waves he had before so dreaded. How does a sense of Jesus' presence diminish every difficulty, and lessen every dread! Peter is permitted to come, and, at the words of Jesus, descends upon the stormy waters! Oh, how strong his faith! how fervent his affection, how touching and relying his confidence, that, by the side of Jesus, no harm could happen to him! And yet, alas! how mingled with weakness!—how is the gold become dim — how soon has a cloud passed over and obscured its brightness! And yet again, how instantly do his thoughts turn to Him who is mighty to save—how strongly, yet how simply, do his words imply where, and where alone, his help and his strength lay! Nature, in her hour of weakness, of suffering, or alarm, may cry out, but faith takes up the cry, and turns it into prayer. I dare not say, with our Lord's rebuke of Peter before me, that Peter did not doubt; but faith was stronger than doubt, and that faith led him, in his weakness, to Jesus. He had said, "Lord, bid me come unto thee," and the Lord had bidden him; and, as Bishop Hall remarks, "Never man said, Bid me come to Thee, in the way of thy commandments, whom Thou didst not both bid and enable to come."

SECTION XLV.

(Chapter xv. verses 1—20.)

It is, without doubt, a most especial blessing that God has communicated to us His will by revelation, and that that revelation has been perpetuated in writing; that every rule of faith, and every precept of the moral law, necessary for our guidance and direction, is to be found in the Scriptures of God, in that book known to us as the Bible. What is written there is binding upon us; what is not written there is not binding upon us, unless it be evidently and indisputably in full agreement with what is written there. And so jealous has God shown himself as to the integrity and purity of His Word, that in the very last injunction in the very last chapter of the book of the Revelation, he has expressly pronounced a solemn and fearful curse on whosoever should add to, or take from His delivered Word; and though of course this denunciation was uttered long after the period alluded to in this chapter, and could therefore have no reference to these scribes and Pharisees, yet Moses also, in his recapitulation of the law, has as distinctly and clearly declared, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it." And yet, in the Jerusalem Talmud, we find it written, "The words of the elders are more desirable than the words of

prophets." I would not deny to tradition its real value; tradition of facts, though not recorded in history, generally has a foundation in truth —customs and usages which have been handed down through many an age are entitled to respect and veneration. So again, sayings of good and great men are often preserved by tradition alone; and one feels gratitude for the record, which has gathered up, as it were, these words and sentences, and preserved them from oblivion. But the tradition which, while it retains the human gloss and man's fallible exposition of Scripture doctrines, in some instances places them side by side with God's Word, as of equal authority, and, in many an instance, as of superior authority, and entitled to supersede and set aside the written and revealed words,—such assumption, or rather presumption, is to be rejected with righteous indignation.

Two such traditions are given to us in this chapter; and though to us they appear so extravagant and absurd, as to excite our astonishment that any could adopt or act upon them, yet there can be no doubt that the majority of the Jewish nation did receive them, and so scrupulously abided by them, that, with regard to the first at least, these scribes and Pharisees, who appear to have been a deputation sent from Jerusalem for the express purpose of entrapping and ensnaring our Lord, proposed the question as one from which they thought he could not extricate Himself—

"Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread." The tradition is on the value of cleanliness, and few would be inclined to dispute the propriety or decency of the rule. We all, I dare say, remember on a little millboard (published, I think, by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and hung up in the cottages of our poor) containing sundry useful and valuable rules, that cleanliness is placed next to godliness; and from thence the saying has arisen, that "cleanliness is next to godliness," as if meaning that, in the scale of moral and religious duties, cleanliness and godliness were in reality side by side, and of equal value and importance. And so here, the tradition of the elders assigned their rule of cleanliness a higher place, and alleged its violation to be a more heinous sin, than the violation of the Seventh Commandment. And this is the error and danger of tradition: it so loves to take man's exposition, and man's code, and man's standard, out of their proper scale, and exalt them to an undue prominence among rules of conduct. Up to a certain point, tradition may be useful, or at least harmless; but it soon passes the boundary of harmlessness, and enters upon the territory of profane, irreverent, pernicious, and even blasphemous assumption. It is carried to its utmost height in the Romish, as it was in the Jewish church; and efforts have been, and still are making to carry it to an undue height among

selves; but I would earnestly press it upon
ı, that you cleave to your Saviour's precept
l your Saviour's practice. "Search the Scrip-
es" was his precept: and in his conflict
h Satan, his appeal was ever to the *written*
ipture: "It is written,"—"It is written again."
ı never find him saying, "It is so handed down
he Talmud,"—"The scribes and Pharisees have
taught;" and when he argued with those scribes
l Pharisees, his question ever was, "How
dest thou?" What is written in your law?"
ank God, then, as among the chief bless-
s of our Protestant land—thank God for His
ə gift of an open and unrestricted Bible. If
be closed, it is not closed by priest or pope,
; by your own indifference to the blessing, or
your own practices, at variance with its pre-
ıts. The Bible is alike the charter of your in-
itance and the safeguard of your way,—the
de and prop of your steps; and as, under the
vish covenant, way-posts were erected in the
d, to direct the manslayer to the city of refuge,
l on them was inscribed REFUGE, so at every
d, every lane, every by-path and every foot-
ck of our Protestant land are found similar
des, and on them, too, is inscribed TO THE LAW,
l TO THE TESTIMONY. "This is the way, walk
in it." So that he who runs may read, and a
ıfaring man need not err therein.

SECTION XLVI.

(Chapter xv. verses 21 to the end.)

We are not told for what purpose Jesus departed from where He was, or why He went into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. Was it that, in his spirit, He knew of this poor woman's sorrow, and that, of his own accord, He went to meet and relieve her. I think we shall find, as we proceed, instances in which our Lord went to particular places for no other purpose than to meet some sorrowing or inquiring one; and it seems to have been so here. It was out of the usual route of our Lord's journeys; no other act of mercy is recorded, no other event is said to have occurred, save that he healed this poor woman's daughter, and immediately returned to his wonted haunts in the neighbourhood of the sea of Galilee. It seems, too, so in accordance with the tender compassion of the Saviour's heart, to be found of them that sought Him not; and though we know that from first to last there could be nothing but lovingkindness in every look, and gesture, and word, towards every afflicted one that cried unto Him in their distress, yet there is no doubt here, at the first glance, something like repulse and harshness in our Lord's reception of this poor sorrowing mother. If, then, we believe, as I think we may believe, that our Lord's journey into these parts was simply and solely to find and

visit this mother in her affliction, it would not only relieve the narrative of much that is apparently, though only apparently, unkind, but would throw a peculiar and touching light on every incident.

This woman was assuredly not a Jewess, but she had lived long enough on the confines of Judea to have received the knowledge of the true God, and to share in the hopes of the Jewish nation, with regard to the promised Messiah; and, though a heathen by birth, she appears to have been far in advance of the majority of Jews in her knowledge and reception of Jesus by his predicted title of the Son David.

In reading these narratives of our Lord's dealings with the various cases brought before him, we have in one respect the advantage of knowing the whole at once; and though we perhaps sympathize in this instance with the sorrowing mother in her apparent rejection, yet, as we know that her petition was granted at the last, we hardly enter fully into the nature of her feelings, the extent of her distress, the agony of her continued supplication, her hoping even against hope, her almost wrestling with her Saviour, in the spirit with which Jacob wrestled with the angel, when he said, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me;" and at last, the triumph of her faith, the approval of her Saviour, and the blessing she had sought. *We*, indeed, have reason to bless the compassion that led our Lord to make this journey into these parts of Tyre

and Sidon, and to seek out this afflicted one: *we* have reason to rejoice at the apparent rejection of her prayer, for it teaches us the invaluable lesson of importunity and perseverance in prayer; and, far beyond that, it teaches us what is even more useful, that delays in God's dealings are not denials of God's mercies. To her first appeal, it was simply silence, as though He heard her not: "He answered her not a word." She then enlisted other suppliants in her behalf: Jesus' own disciples, moved by her harrowing distress, and continued appeals for pity, joined their prayers to hers, and besought their Master to send her away with an answer of peace and mercy. It is a great cordial in sorrow to know that others' prayers are going up before a throne of grace in our behalf; it is like many hands knocking at the door at once; it is like many voices calling on Him within to arise and answer; it is like the case of the poor paralytic borne into the presence of Jesus in the arms of his friends: and Jesus has promised an especial blessing to the united supplications, though but of two or three, in His name. Here there were twelve, in addition to the mother, and yet still it was apparent rejection: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But faith sees a glimmering light, where to others' eyes all would be darkness. The answer spake of mercy to the lost ones of Israel; but were there not lost ones elsewhere—was not she a lost one?

and if there was mercy for some, why not for her? She therefore fell at his feet, worshipping, and crying, "Lord, help me." It was like the touching appeal of Esau, "Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept." There was one more trial of her faith to be made, one more ordeal to go through, one more heating of the furnace to be endured. Silence had not silenced her, repulse had not repulsed her. She was still to be tried with contempt and scorn. Well may the Lord say, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways." "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs." But oh the tenacity of a mother's love! oh the strength of woman's faith! The word of Jesus was indeed "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit," but faith was more than conqueror through Him that loved her—patience had its perfect work, and as humility laid her low, so it kept her low in the dust before her Saviour and her God. She repudiates not the appellation, she acknowledges its fitness,—yet, as before, even in this contemptuous rejection, she finds a way of hope, a gleam of light, and her answer is to the effect, "Truth, Lord: yet even the rejected dogs are not denied the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Oh! blessed importunity of prayer—oh, successful perseverance in knocking

at the door of mercy. "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Her daughter was indeed made whole from that very hour; but did either forget the Saviour who had loved, the Lord who had healed? We cannot doubt but that both are among those who were to come in from the east and the west, and to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

SECTION XLVII.

(Chapter xvi. verses 1—12.)

Our Lord more than once takes occasion to contrast the wisdom, shrewdness and activity of men, with regard to worldly things, with their ignorance, dulness of apprehension, and sluggishness, as to things spiritual and heavenly. To the one, they are listless and indifferent, or, if roused, hostile and averse to inquiry or investigation: the other calls forth all their keenness, calculation, and experience. We have an instance of this here, coupled with the little regard men have for their own consistency of character or conduct in the prosecution of some favourite aim of their own. The Pharisees and Sadducees are here joined together in one common cause, of endeavouring to ensnare the Saviour. In every other matter they were as much opposed to each other as light is to darkness, and were always at variance, politically as well as religiously. They were, in

fact, the two great parties in Jerusalem and Judea: what the one proposed, the other opposed—what the one advocated, the other objected to: but they here find a common bond of union in their hatred of Jesus; and, in their desire to destroy him, can for a moment lay aside and forget their mutual animosities and ill will. So Herod and Pontius Pilate became friends; but the compact was signed in the blood of Jesus. It is a melancholy evidence, that men are more influenced by passion than by principle, and that hatred to truth is a stronger feeling than even the advocacy of party. A Pharisee hated a Sadducee, and a Sadducee hated a Pharisee; but they hated Jesus more: and so both Pharisee and Sadducee could unite to hunt down a common object of hatred.

Their mode of attack on this occasion was to demand a sign from Jesus,—"a sign from heaven." They had before made a similar demand, and He had then declared that no sign should be given, save that of the prophet Jonah, which they themselves should be in part the agents to fulfil. And long after that sign had been given, and manifested in their sight; long after the resurrection of Jesus, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost; long after "signs and wonders" and "many infallible proofs" had been abundantly given; it is still the record of St. Paul concerning them, "The Jews require a sign." It would be difficult to know what sign could be given which had not been already vouch-

safed, and still more difficult to know what sign could have convinced those who were so infatuated as to say, "He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils." "The heart of this people had indeed waxed gross, and their eyes had they closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes and be converted." They might have remembered in their own Scripture, how a prophet of old had answered, "If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty." But Jesus came not to destroy, but to save men's lives; and though he indignantly declares that it was only a wicked and profligate and adulterous generation, that, in the face of such evidence as they had, pretended to desire more, and that none should be given, save the one to which he had already referred them, He at the same time, in mercy as well as warning, bids them use their reason, and their own senses with the same clearness, decision, and promptitude, as they would foretell, from the appearance of the sky, a sunny or a rainy day. There were even then in the spiritual horizon unmistakeable signs, which he who ran might read. Whose ensigns and standards floated in their capitol? whose image and superscription was engraven on their coin? whose procurator and deputy issued decrees, and enacted laws? Cæsar's; and Cæsar was a foreign and a distant prince. "Their own sceptre had departed from Judah, and the lawgiver from between his feet,"

and therefore Jacob's prophecy and Jacob's inference was fulfilled. Again, their own prophet Daniel had declared that at the end of seventy weeks, or 490 prophetic years, the Messiah should come, and the Messiah should be cut off, and the hour was at hand. And their canon of Scripture had closed with the emphatic declaration, "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." And in the following chapter of this Gospel we have our Lord's own exposition of this prophecy, "I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Then the disciples understood that He spake unto them of John the Baptist." And what the disciples, in their docility, understood, these Sadducees and Pharisees might have understood also; but they asked, not from any desire after truth, for any confirmation of their own faith, or wish to do Him honour, but to "tempt" and to ensnare Him, and were therefore left in their blindness.

It furnishes a very useful lesson to ourselves; for though we are not, I trust, likely to make any such irreverent demand of Jesus, yet it is a very dangerous evil, and very much akin to this demand of the Pharisees, to want to have all things in Scripture brought down to the level of our understandings, and to think that we may be justified, if not in actually disbelieving, at least in putting on one side what we do not comprehend. Thus,

for instance, the doctrine of "our election in Christ" is made a stumbling-block to many, and yet it is "full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort." It is as false in reasoning as dangerous in practice to reject what is above our reason. "I never saw God," is the objection of the atheist, and his inference is, "Therefore there is no God:" while the inference of truth is, "Therefore He is invisible." So an irreverent intruder into God's counsels says, "This doctrine is unintelligible to me, *therefore* I do not believe it." The inference of the lowly child of God is, "This doctrine is beyond, but not contrary to, my comprehension, and "the Spirit itself beareth witness with my spirit" that the doctrine is true. We have no warrant to plead ignorance of our duties or of our faith. It is a common saying with the unlettered, "I am no scholar;" but the excuse is too often merely an evasion; and as these seekers of a further sign from Jesus would have still continued in unbelief had it been granted, so he who pleads ignorance, and yet acts contrary to the light he has, is not so much desirous of knowledge, as of a continuance in his ignorance. There are many professors who have *light enough* to know what should be done, but have not *love enough* to do what they know. "Give me," says a pithy old writer, "the professor who perfectly sees the way he should go, and readily goes the way he sees." It is not, therefore, without especial meaning that our Lord leaves on record a solemn caution against the

leaven, or doctrine, of these Pharisees and Sadducees,—the cold, heartless infidelity of the one, and the equally ruinous formality and hypocrisy of the other.

SECTION XLVIII.

(Chapter xvi. verses 13—20.)

THE passage I have just read contains the verse which has given rise to more controversy than almost any other portion of Scripture. It is, in fact, the passage on which the Roman Catholic Church chiefly rests its claim for supremacy. It would be unnecessary, and, indeed, not very easy, in our limited space of time, to enter into this controversy. I would, however, simply remark, that the claim which the Roman Catholics make rests on our Lord's declaration, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it;" and their assumption is, that Peter is the rock on which Christ declared his church should be built. We have not, assuredly, Peter's own refutation in words, of the claim now made in his name; but we have that which is equally valuable, his own explicit declaration in one of his Epistles, of what the foundation is on which all believers must be built; and we have, also, what is equally conclusive, and that is, that he never assumed any authority or supremacy in the infant church,

—none was claimed by him, and none was conceded by the rest. On the other hand, the rock on which our Lord declared his church should be built, has been assumed by many to be the noble confession made, and the truth enunciated, by Peter: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," and Christ himself to be the Rock of Ages, which we know He is, the only Rock on which to build for eternity. But even supposing that our Lord meant Peter, and that, as a preacher and promulgator of the Christian faith, he was a foundation on which the Church should be built, the same is said not of Peter only, but of all the apostles and prophets too. "Ye are built," says St. Paul, "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,"—but he expressly adds, "Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." And to guard against the possibility of error, he goes on to say, "*In whom*," ἐν ᾧ, in the singular, that is, in Jesus Christ, "all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: *in whom* (ἐν ᾧ again) ye are builded together for an habitation of God, through the Spirit." There can be no doubt that what is here meant is, that this doctrine, viz., that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, was the doctrine which the prophets first, though obscurely, revealed, and the apostles afterwards openly preached; and in that sense, therefore, they were declared to be the foundation of the Christian Church, having

received their authority and commission from Jesus Christ himself, the only Ruler and Supreme Head of His Church. And this is perhaps still more distinctly asserted in the Book of Revelation, where "the twelve apostles of the Lamb" are expressly called "the twelve foundations of the wall" of the New Jerusalem. The confession which drew this declaration from our Lord was indeed a noble one—what the apostle, speaking of Jesus Christ, calls "witnessing a good confession;" and had it been the declaration of Peter alone, had the belief and the knowledge of this truth been confined to him alone, and concealed from the rest of the apostles, there might have been some slight ground for the claim of Peter's supremacy; but the very same confession had been spontaneously made by all the apostles, at a time, too, when Peter's faith had for a moment failed him—when Jesus came to them walking on the sea, and they, one and all, convinced by this act of Deity, "which treadeth on the waves of the sea," so expressly declared to be the attribute of the Almighty, cried out, "Of a truth, thou art the Son of God." The language is not so vivid, so fervent,—but the confession is as perfect and complete as Peter's.

And with regard to the keys, on which much stress is also laid, I would merely remark, without going at present into the extent and purport of the commission therein intrusted, that the keys are symbolical of authority, and that the

authority on this occasion delegated to Peter was, after his resurrection, extended by Christ to all his apostles alike, and that therefore no claim for supremacy can rest on this.

The question, however, which most nearly concerns us, is the same which our Lord put to His disciples. Whom do *we* say that Jesus is? What answer shall we give? It is easy to utter the words of Peter with our lips: it is easy to make the confession with the mouth; but does the heart also believe unto righteousness? Are we really receiving Christ as *our* Saviour, to save *us from* our sins? Are we acknowledging Him in His threefold character, as our Prophet, Priest, and King?—our Prophet, to instruct and teach; our Priest, to atone and intercede; and our King, to rule over us? If so, blessed are we; for be assured, that knowledge of, and that faith in, Christ, is of no earthly human growth, but has been revealed to us by "our Father which is in heaven." And are we resting solely on Christ? It would be a poor footing to have one foot on the rock and the other on the sand; both feet must be on the rock, and Christ must be all in all; not like that celebrated Cardinal in the Romish Church, Cardinal Bellarmine, who in his last will bequeathed half his soul to the Virgin Mary and the other half to Jesus Christ. God will accept no divided heart: "if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him."

SECTION XLIX.

(Chapter xvi. verse 21 to the end.)

"LET him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Never was there a caution more necessary for the frail children of men. Yesterday we heard our Lord say to Peter, "Blessed art thou, O Simon;" to-day we hear the same Saviour, the same Truth which pronounced the blessing, exclaim in righteous indignation to the same man, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Never since that memorable scene in the wilderness had rebuke so severe proceeded from the lips of the gracious Redeemer, and the words with which He then repelled Satan are, word for word, the very same He here addresses to Peter. Can we, then, doubt that Peter spake thus unadvisedly by more powerful agency than the suggestion of his own affectionate heart? The words were Peter's, the counsel was Satan's. We are warned that Satan can assume the appearance of an angel of light, and deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect. As we read the words of Peter which gave rise to this rebuke, we are almost inclined to think them the affectionate expostulations of a faithful friend, unwilling that one whom he loved should undergo the sufferings and death, which Jesus had just declared should be his lot. And at the moment we are ready to ask with surprise, what

there could be in such expression of apparent love and zeal to draw forth so painful a rebuke. There were, no doubt, times when the human nature of Jesus shrunk from the contemplation of the sufferings He was to undergo, and the cup He had covenanted to drink, and, at the near approach of them, He even prayed that, if it were possible, the cup might pass from him; it might be that, even now, when He was recounting with such minute and painful accuracy the details of the outrages, and the mockery, and the scourging, and the lingering agonies of his death,—it is possible that even then some such feelings as we know He gave utterance to in the garden of Gethsemane might pass through His mind; and when He heard one of His own followers, though with the tone of affection and the gesture of zeal, give utterance to the thought that had flashed through His own heart, He appears instantly to have recognised the counsel of him, who, once before, would have induced Him to forsake His work, and fall down and worship him; and, with the utterance of the same words with which He had then repulsed him, bids him at once get behind Him. Just for a moment think, *if* Jesus had yielded to the counsel, *if* He had withdrawn from the sufferings and death He had described as awaiting Him, what would have been the result? His own purposes of mercy to our fallen race would have been unfulfilled; the eternal counsels of the Triune Jehovah would have been unex-

ecuted; God's word would have been falsified; man's sin would have been unpardoned—his debt uncancelled; the handwriting against him would have remained in force;—man would have perished for ever, and Satan and Hell have triumphed. The counsel, indeed, savoured not of the things that be of God, but far more plainly indicated the cowardice and shrinking of a worldly spirit from the hardships and perils of human persecution and wrong. It was well to warn his disciples of what the followers of a crucified Lord were to expect; the intimation only of their Master's sufferings had drawn forth an exhibition of a most fatal tendency and spirit. An enemy had sown the tares,—they must not be suffered to grow, they must be at once rooted up.

It was in merciful and affecting warning, therefore, that our Lord proceeded to announce, even more distinctly than He had hitherto done, the nature of the conflict in which they would be engaged if they followed Him. He had at the first called them to follow Him, but it was to no easy service, to no worldly grandeur, or distinguished rank. It was to suffering and outrage, to obloquy and scorn, to hunger and thirst, and nakedness and death. And He now tells them that their life was to be an inward strife, as well as an outward struggle; an inward sacrifice and self-denial; a thwarting of self, a surrender of self, and all their preconceived hopes, and opinions,

and prejudices; a curbing and crossing of their own wills; an act of unceasing warfare against self and selfish suggestions and motives. And more than that, there was a cross, too, to be borne, a patient, passive, uncomplaining endurance of whatever His Father should lay upon them, and that till death closed the scene. And yet, formidable as was the prospect, chilling and repulsive to flesh and blood, it was in reality a slight sacrifice, a sacrifice but for time, while the recompense was incalculable and for eternity. Spiritual arithmetic is very different from that of the world. It adds up its losses, and the sum is gain; the world adds up its gains, and the sum is loss: for the world's gains, however heaped up, pressed down, and running over, are not to be, and cannot be, weighed in the same balance with a soul for which Christ died. We may well say, "It cost more," far more than a whole world could give, "to redeem one soul."

SECTION L.

(Chapter xvii. verses 1—13.)

THOUGH Peter had fallen into so grievous a sin, and had drawn upon himself so severe a rebuke, it had been more a sin of inadvertence than intention, and proceeding, as it did, from the suggestion of the Evil One, acting on his fervent and affectionate temperament, he is once

more restored to his Lord's favour, and in a few days admitted, with the two brothers, James and John, to the most glorious manifestation of the Divine presence. One week after the transactions recorded in the last chapter, Jesus takes these three disciples into a mountain apart, and, as our version words it, "was transfigured before them;" that is, as far as their human and mortal senses could bear, He permitted His glory,—the glory which He had with the Father before the worlds were, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,—to break forth in radiance before them. It was, no doubt, intended as a confirmation of their faith; it was, even thus early, to do away with the reproach of the cross; and as Peter had before deprecated the idea of his Master's ignominious treatment, he is now permitted to see the unveiled glory of that Lord, which, at no very distant day, was to be so humiliatingly eclipsed. Peter, and James, and John were to witness the agonies of Gethsemane, and a glimpse, therefore, of the glories of His Godhead on Tabor is first vouchsafed to them. We may perhaps ask, why these, and these only, were selected,—why they all were not admitted to the same glorious revelation. They were all to go forth and preach in the name of a crucified Master; they were all alike, save one, to be witnesses of His crucifixion: why were not all witnesses also of his glory? It is a question of but little importance. It is sufficient that God

Himself had declared, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word should be established, and that Jesus appoints and selects that number as sufficient. Of these three, selected by our Lord for this honourable distinction, James was called to an early death—he soon drank of the same cup of which his Master had to drink, and in which he had declared his readiness to share. Of the other two, their lives were spared for lengthened service and usefulness in the Church; by their labours the Church was edified and extended in their own days, and by their writings now, the same Church is still edified and built up. The scene which they saw on Mount Tabor was not likely soon to pass away from their memory; it must have remained as a beacon-light through many a night of gloom and darkness, to guide and cheer them on their way, like the star that guided the wise men from their Eastern homes. They were, indeed, forbidden to speak of it, or to tell it to any one, till their Master had arisen from the dead, and by that act of omnipotence had established His sovereignty over death and the grave, His triumph over hell and Satan; but we can well imagine how their hearts must have burned within them to give utterance to the wondrous theme. And that they should leave on record their remembrance of the scene is no more than we should expect, and no more than we find. John, indeed, in his supplementary Gospel, does not give the

detail of this glorious manifestation, as it had been already recorded by all his predecessors; but in his very first chapter, among the proofs of the Godhead of Jesus, he alludes to the very scene before us, when he declares of himself and fellow apostles, "We *beheld* His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." And St. Peter more fully records the fact, as an evidence of the truth of what he had made known unto them, that he was an actual "eye-witness of His majesty," and not an eye-witness only, but an ear-witness also, of that "voice from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven," he declares that himself, and they that were with him, "heard when they were with Jesus in the holy mount." We may, perhaps, be ready to wish that such a glorious manifestation were made to ourselves, and to think that if such a vision and revelation were vouchsafed to us, we should have no more haltings and faintings, no more turnings aside by the way, no more weakness of faith, no more shrinkings and flinchings from trial,—yet, alas! it would not, in all probability, be so. Even with these favoured apostles, for the strengthening of whose faith it was so especially intended, it, in a measure, failed in the hour of trial; and in the very first burst of danger, Peter denied his Lord, and James and John forsook Him and fled. And it is probably in allusion to this melancholy failure, and from

the experience of his own weakness in the time of trial, that St. Peter, after recording the events on the mount, goes on to say, "We have a more sure word of prophecy," intimating that the Word of God is a more sure and unfailing stay than even the most striking vision; as Jesus himself declared, that "if men would not hear Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." We have that "sure word of prophecy," and far more than that, for "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son," and "therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip; for," as the apostle adds, "how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

SECTION LI.

(Chapter xvii. verse 14 to the end.)

WHAT a contrast must have presented itself to the sight of Jesus and his three disciples, to the scene they had so recently witnessed on the mount of Tabor! and how soon had they to return to the toils and turmoils, the cares and sorrows, of suffering human nature! On the mount had been presented to them a brief but

glorious glimpse of that eternal world which was to be their future home and rest. They had seen their Master clothed in that radiant glory which was the attribute of Godhead; and they had seen, too, the portals of heaven, as it were, open, and two of its now glorified inmates, but once, like themselves, residents on earth, walking once more amongst them, and conversing with their Lord and Master on terms of holy intimacy and friendship. One can almost realize the feeling of the affectionate disciple who would have gladly lingered in such a scene, and yet with inconsistent impetuosity proposed to build three perishing temporary tabernacles for their Master and these glorified saints. But Jesus might have answered, "Mine hour is not come. I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and many a day, amid the erring and the suffering children of men. There is still sickness to be healed, and sorrow to be alleviated. I must work while it is yet day; the night cometh, when no man can work." And so it was; for no sooner had they descended from the mount, than one of those melancholy incidents which are so frequent and so sad in human life, met their view, —a father weeping over a son afflicted with the most pitiable of all human calamities, and who had, through many a sorrowing year, mourned over his lamentable condition. To the father's eye it appeared but one of those melancholy but not uncommon diseases incident to our fallen nature—lunacy, mingled with epilepsy; and yet,

oh! how sad, how hopeless, how irremediable by human agency! The sweet blossoms of childhood crushed by this incipient malady, the season of boyhood passed in the same hopeless state, and all the anticipations of youth foregone through the same incurable disease. How many avenues to sorrow are opened when a child is born into a family! and yet how natural for friends and relations to congratulate parents on the birth of a child, as if the event must needs be, without risk or possibility of disappointment, a source of rejoicing and exultation. As it is said on the birth of the Baptist, that when his mother's "neighbours and cousins heard how the Lord had shewn mercy upon her, they rejoiced with her," so here there might be, and there no doubt was, rejoicing when this child was born into the world; and yet Simeon's prediction might have been as truly uttered to the mother of this child as to the mother of the infant Jesus, "Yea, and a sword shall pierce through thine own heart also."

Nor is it sickness and disease alone which gives sorrow to a parent. There are far sharper arrows than these which pierce his heart; and the bitterest tears he sheds are not so often over a child's early grave, as over his sin and ruin,—his being given over, if not literally, as this unhappy youth was, to the possession of a devil, yet to his being taken captive by the devil at his will, and as remorselessly hurried, as this poor lunatic was, into the fire and the water,—the fire

of passion and the floods of temptation. Children little think how many openings there are for sorrow to a parent's heart; and yet I could advise no better remedy than that which this poor father sought, to take them to Jesus. It was not unnatural, nor wrong, nor distrustful, that he first attempted to gain his end through the disciples. He had no doubt heard that they had exercised miraculous powers, and that evil spirits had departed at their command; and as Jesus was not at hand, he might naturally and properly apply to them. But it failed. It is possible that these disciples might on this occasion assume an undue authority, and arrogate to themselves a higher power than their commission warranted, as Moses in the wilderness had done, when the people murmured for want of water, and he said to them, "Hear now, ye rebels; must *we* fetch you water out of this rock?" From the reply, too, of Jesus, it would appear that there was something also in the temper and feeling of the people around, which impeded the free grace and mercy of God; and it might be, too, that God in his wisdom caused their power to be suspended for a time, both in order to try and confirm the father's faith, and to leave on record the memorable and valuable lesson which he deduced from their failure. As regarded the father, it had its end; he no sooner saw Jesus on his descent from the mount, than he hastened to Him with the unhappy object of his affection and his affliction. "It is the strength

of our affections," says old Flavel, "which puts such strength into our afflictions." I do not think it was so on the present occasion; for the father forgets his own sorrow, makes no mention of himself, but his whole heart and speech is engaged for his son,—"Lord, have mercy on my son." And his faith was rewarded. Jesus rebuked, indeed, the crowds, as he "rebuked the devil; but the child was cured from that very hour." It happened unto the father as it did in after ages to the mother of an erring child, whom, in her affliction, a pious friend consoled with the assurance, "God will never suffer the child of so many prayers finally to perish."

There is still a lesson to be gathered up from this passage of Scripture, which we must not omit, "Why could not we cast him out?" Jesus answered, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." We are not called upon literally to expel demons or work miracles; but we are taught by this, that religion is not that mere summer-evening's stroll which some imagine it to be. Evil tempers, irregular passions, and inveterate habits are not expelled at a mere bidding; nor are high attainments in grace and holiness ever granted to occasional or indolent exertions. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force:" and "every man," says St. Paul, "that *striveth* for the mastery is temperate in all things," and his own practice was consistent with his teaching; for he adds of him-

self, "I keep under my body, and bring it unto subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a rejected one."

SECTION LII.

(Chapter xviii. verses 1—20.)

We have a sad evidence at the beginning of this chapter of the deep-rooted effects of prejudice, and how difficult it is to remove a pre-conceived opinion, particularly when our wish is father to the thought. The disciples of Jesus had in their own minds settled it as an indisputable fact, that our Lord's purpose was to erect and establish a glorious kingdom, in which they, as His adherents and followers, should hold conspicuous stations of rank and eminence. It was, no doubt, mixed up with much vagueness of conjecture; but still a kingdom they had decided it would be, and no intimations of approaching suffering and eventual death could obliterate the feeling from their minds. And here we find the question openly and painfully discussed amongst them;—not, who should follow their Master closest in the path He had told them He was to tread; not, who should have grace and strength to suffer with Him; not, who should be the first among their little band to seal their fidelity with their blood;—but who should occupy the highest

post in their Lord's kingdom. They designate it, indeed, "a kingdom in heaven;" but it is evident that all their ideas of it were of an earthly kind, and a worldly character. Our Lord, in his reply, does not deny that He was a king—that a kingdom was prepared for Him, and that His followers should hereafter reign with Him in glory; but He most thoroughly and practically undeceives them as to their ideas of the nature of that kingdom. He had indeed before told them who should be the inmates of that kingdom, and the characters that would be admitted there, when He commenced His sermon on the mount with the declaration, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." But they had evidently forgotten, or misunderstood, or perverted His saying; and He therefore here practically illustrates His precept, and at the same time settles their dispute by calling a little child to Him, and, placing him in the midst of them, emphatically declares, "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." The ideas of heaven, with many in the present day, are perhaps as little defined as those of the apostles at this period; they look upon it more as a locality than a state, that is,—they regard heaven more as a place where happiness is to be sought, and found, and enjoyed, than as a condition or state of being, and frame of mind, from which happiness emanates as water from its source. And yet our Lord

here evidently points to character, disposition, temper, feeling, everything that is inward, as the graces meet for heaven. It is with man something to be done and suffered, something outward and visible—as the young man in the next chapter asks, "What good thing *shall I do*, that I may have eternal life?" or the Philippian jailor, "What must I *do* to be saved?" It has been ever the same. In earlier days, the enthusiast who passed the larger portion of his life on the summit of a column, the anchorite in his cell, the crusader in the Holy Land, were all alike ignorant of, and equally needing, the lesson Jesus here taught his disciples. Ask the Roman Catholic who should be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and he would point to some saint in his calendar, who by vigils, and fastings, and macerations, and scourgings, had earned his title to heaven. Were we ourselves asked who would be greatest, or at least occupy an eminent position in the kingdom of heaven, we should perhaps select the martyr who had shed his blood for Jesus, the man who had taken joyfully the spoiling of his goods for the kingdom of heaven's sake, or one who had undergone perils, and privations, and persecutions, in carrying the name of Jesus to heathen and darkened lands. And yet we should be all alike answering, and acting, and feeling very differently from the spirit and purport of the reply of Jesus. He points to an inward frame, to an inherent grace. The foundation, no doubt, must be laid where

St. Paul laid it, in his answer to the jailor, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." No doubt the whole must be the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerating and converting the whole man, and new-creating the whole materials of the inner man; and then that change, that conversion, results in a character such as this which our Lord here places before his disciples, "humble, teachable, and mild." It is the highest attainment of character we can affix to any one, to say of him, "He is of a child-like spirit"—in simplicity a child—in humility a child—in docility and lovingness a child. There is, no doubt, much in a child that indicates his earthly origin: there is the yet immature germ of the evil that is in the man; but there is also in the character and disposition of *childhood*, rather than of the individual child, that lowliness of spirit, that tractableness of temper, and that clinging, dependent trustfulness of love, which, wrought and moulded by the Spirit of God, would grow up into the perfect Christian character, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, as well as meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

SECTION LIII.

(Chapter xviii. verse 21 to the end.)

MANY of our Lord's discourses may be considered as extended commentaries on different

sections of the prayer He taught His disciples and us. The present parable, though arising from a question asked by Peter, and that question induced by a previous observation of Jesus, is evidently illustrative of the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." In fact, the moral deduced from it at the close is almost a verbal transcription of the petition. It would be a bold assertion to say that this was the most interesting of all our Lord's parables; yet there is something in it which so touches our feelings, that so appeals to that instinctive sense of justice and that disapprobation of gross wrong which is implanted in our natures, that our best and holiest sympathies are enlisted in the narrative: at first, on behalf of the unhappy debtor of the king—his immense debt—his inability to pay—the sentence against himself and his whole family—his earnest supplication—and the free forgiveness and cancelling of the whole through the unbounded mercy of his creditor. We sympathise in his distress; we rejoice with him in the mercy which he found. And in the same proportion as we have sympathised with him in his own appeals for pity, so is our indignation aroused to its very utmost by his ungenerous and ungrateful return for the mercy shown to himself in the conduct he exhibits towards his fellow-servant; and we feel as if we longed to join that band of his fellow-servants, and to add

our testimony to theirs against the unfeeling harshness of this thankless man. Every incident in the two portions of the narrative is so strikingly contrasted, and so heightened even by its very simplicity, that one feels how truly was our Lord described when it was said of Him, "Never man spake like this man." And yet, in our feelings of indignation against this unmerciful servant, we may fall into the error of David, who, in his condemnation of another's supposed wrong, forgot his own sin; and we may need another Nathan to arouse us with the startling denunciation, "Thou art the man." For who is the debtor that owes this overwhelming debt to his Lord, and has nothing wherewith to pay? *I* am that debtor; *you* are that debtor; and every child of Adam is that debtor. The insolvency of this unhappy man is the insolvency of our race. It would be endless to enumerate all the ways which the Lord may take to reckon with His servants, and all the items of which our debt is composed. There is, however, an unerring debt-book kept; and our Lord here warns us, that, whatever our ideas of our own respective debt to God may be, it is in His sight, and in His reckoning, as vast, and heavy, and hopeless a one as that of the debtor in the parable; and that, in our helplessness and extremity, He has offered to us the same mercy which He did to him. He has borne with our provocations; He has endured our contradictions against Himself;

He has forgiven our trespasses: "I am He that blotteth out as a cloud thy transgressions, and as a thick cloud thy sins." The parable then proceeds to the duty which it was intended to illustrate: the wrongs and provocations of others against ourselves, and the extent of forgiveness required of us, and that arising from a sense and recollection of what God has forgiven us. There may be some who would think that Peter's measure of forgiveness was an overflowing one, and that a wrong seven times repeated, and seven times forgiven, might well be supposed to exhaust even a Christian's patience and forbearance. Alas! it too often does; and, like Jonah with his gourd, when we have reached a certain point of injury or wrong, we would fain persuade ourselves that we do well to be angry. There are far many more who never even reach this mark, who visit every offence with the rod, and every sin with scourges; whose temper brooks no palliation, and admits of no excuse; and who break forth into resentment and wrath at even the little provocations of the day. It was well said by John Wesley to General Oglethorpe, whose servant had offended him by some neglect or omission, and whose intemperate anger towards him Wesley was deprecating. "I never forgive," was the general's answer. "Then, sir, I hope you never sin," was the reply made by the man of God to the unreflecting man of the world. And it is to these daily causes of strife

and contention that I would more especially have you attend. A real, grievous injury may not very often be done to us—a glaring, serious, positive wrong may not often fall to our lot; but the pettier slights, and provocations, and trials of life meet us at every turn, and during almost every hour, and we soon exhaust, not only Peter's scantier measure, but even our Lord's more extended numbers. And what then? Patience must have its perfect work. "God is provoked *every* day." We repeat to God every day the petition in the Lord's Prayer for His forgiveness to us, because we every day need His repeated and continued forgiveness of ourselves. They may not be in the eyes of the world great and grievous sins; they may be more shortcomings than misdoings, but they still need the blood of Jesus; and we ask for the cleansing and washing of that blood, and we affix to our petition for God's forgiveness to ourselves, the condition on which we ask it, the terms on which we presume to solicit it, that we extend to the brother, or the neighbour, or the fellow-creature who wrongs, or provokes, or irritates, or grieves us, as full, and free, and unreserved a forgiveness as we ask for ourselves; and our Lord's inference is one to which even our own reason sets the seal, that if we do not forgive every one his brother their trespasses, so neither will our Father in heaven forgive us our trespasses.

SECTION LIV.

(Chapter xix. verses 1—13.)

THE first verse of this chapter mentions our Lord's departure from Galilee for Judea. Jesus had before intimated the certainty of the trials and sufferings which awaited Him in Judea: He had declared that it was impossible for a prophet to perish out of Jerusalem. The time of His being offered up was now nigh at hand; and, in calm anticipation of all that was to befall Him, He now leaves Galilee, to return to it no more, till after His resurrection from the dead.

We may well imagine the saddened feelings with which He would gaze upon the hills, and valleys, and towns of Galilee, and its lake, so often the scene and witness of His miracles, and by the side of which He had so often sat and taught. They were now gradually fading from His eyes; His voice would be no more heard among them; and sorrow no doubt filled His heart, and tears perhaps His eyes, as He gazed on the receding features of the landscape. He had, indeed, already given utterance to the sorrow of His heart, as He thought on the impending doom of her most favoured cities, of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. The light which had so long shone upon them was to shine no more. Nazareth, the home of His childhood and youth, was to be visited no more.

It is true that the Evangelist but simply and solely records the fact, that "Jesus departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judea beyond Jordan;" but *we* must not, cannot close our eyes to the fact, that the privileges which Galilee had so long enjoyed—privileges so far beyond those of Tyre and Sidon, and which, if Sodom and Gomorrah had possessed, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes—these privileges were now to be withdrawn for ever. It is too late to attempt to recall an opportunity gone—to redeem a privilege lost. Galilee has for more than 1800 years been in darkness and desolation, because she would not hearken to the things spoken of Jesus: she knew not the day of her visitation; nor the things belonging to her peace; and now they have been, and still are, hidden from her eyes.

There was a hope yet left for Judea, there was still a message of mercy to be delivered unto her. In the language, and in the promise of prophecy, her King was still to visit her, "bringing salvation." They too, as well as the inhabitants of Galilee, were among those lost sheep of the house of Israel to whom He was sent; to them also must He preach, to them deliver the glad tidings He came to fulfil. And yet Jesus must have fully known that His errand would be a fruitless one: He must have known that this visit to Judea would be the very climax of the nation's sin, the coping-stone of her people's guilt,

in crucifying the Lord of life; and that, humanly speaking, it would have been a greater act of mercy to have remained afar from them, and not to have afforded them, as it were, the opportunity of adding this, the consummation of their wickedness. But it was not so. Jesus went for the express purpose of snatching them from ruin; and though, as a nation, they did fill up the measure of their iniquity, and as a nation they were doomed of God to destruction, yet, who can tell the number of the individuals that were indeed snatched as brands from the burning, and who, during this last visit of mercy, were either awakened by His denunciations, won by His invitations, or convinced and converted by His miracles? Who shall be able to count, till that day when the Lord reckons up His jewels, all those to whom this visit of the Saviour to Judea and Jerusalem, though the sealing of the nation's doom, was but the herald of mercy and the precursor of salvation? The Pharisees, indeed, met him, as usual, with an ensnaring question as to the lawfulness of divorce. It was a question which happened to be at the time rather vehemently debated in the two schools of Hillel and Shammai, but which, in a family circle like ours, cannot be of the slightest profit to discuss. I would only remark that every institution, and ordinance, and appointment of God was good in itself, ordained for good, and for the happiness of mankind: but sin soon

came and altered everything; sin soon introduced sorrow, and worse than sorrow; and evil passions soon embittered that which God had ordained only as the source of happiness and good. It is well to remember that both marriage and the sabbath were alike appointed of God before man had sinned; that they were given to man in Paradise, in his state of innocence; and, save personal communion with his Maker, were the best blessings even of the garden of Eden. Death had not then entered into the world, when the Creator instituted marriage; there was not then affixed to it that saddening clause, "*Till death us do part,*" which has overshadowed it ever since; it was to be an union for ever, indissoluble and eternal. There is but one union now on which that fatal sentence is not written, and that is the union between the believer and Christ: there is no separation there; and death, which rends all other ties, but rivets that the more closely and the more strongly.

SECTION LV.

(Chapter xix. verses 13—16.)

It would be difficult to select any one portion of our Lord's character or conduct on earth as being more attractive than another. All is so consistently in keeping, that to whatever portion of His public ministry, or His private life, we

direct our attention, there is still the same impress of unbounded tenderness and love—of love which never wearied, and of tenderness which ever overflowed, wherever suffering or helplessness met His view. And yet the love shown by Jesus for little children is so conspicuously beautiful, it is so marked a feature in the character of Him, of whom it was foretold, that as a shepherd He should "gather the lambs with His arms, and carry them in His bosom," that one feels a peculiar delight in lingering for a few moments over the love of the Saviour for the little ones of His flock. A short time ago we read of Jesus calling a little child unto Him, and, placing him in the midst of His disciples, declaring, that unless they, and unless we too, become in character and disposition as a little child, there could be no admission into the kingdom of heaven. Here, we have Jesus dealing with children of a still tenderer age, infants in their mothers' arms; yet even towards them, and over them, He exhibits the same, or perhaps a still more touching love, and gives utterance to a still more remarkable declaration, that "of such is the kingdom of heaven." There could be no love as yet in their infant hearts towards Jesus—no stretching out of their tiny hands to Him—no lifting up of their feeble cries to Him—unconscious recipients, as well as silent seekers. It is their helplessness alone, as far as they are concerned, which wins His regard and notice. No doubt their parents'

love, their parents' earnestness and faith, was of much avail, for "*they* brought them to Jesus," they besought Him to lay His hands on them, and pray over them. And what an encouragement here to parents, and not to them only, but to every relation and friend, to bring every case to Jesus, however helpless, however hopeless, in itself! There may be those that would rebuke you, as over-officious and over-zealous, as intrusive, and hindering of other and more important work, who might say, as some in mistaken deference did say, "Thy daughter is dead, why trouble ye the Master?"—the case is hopeless; or, as these disciples may have said, "Why bring such infants as these? why encumber our Master with such needless, useless labour? why ask for His notice of those who are incapable of wishing, or valuing, or even knowing that He notices them? Give place to those who need it more. Stand by, for there are others more deserving of the Saviour's love and kindness." Such might be man's reasoning, but not such the Saviour's acting. The very idea of infancy is that of perfect helplessness: its only strength, so to speak, is its feebleness; and He whose love is far beyond even that of an earthly mother's, rejected not these little ones in their low estate. And oh what a glorious idea does this narrative give us of that electing sovereignty and free grace of God which so unequivocally declares, that "of such is the kingdom of God"! There can be, I

think, but little doubt that our Lord is not here so much referring, as in the former case, to the character and disposition of childhood; His language then was, "Except ye be converted, and become *as little children*, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven;" here His words are singularly explicit, when He says, "*Of such is* the kingdom of heaven:" these, and such as these, are admissible into heaven. "The kingdom of heaven" may undoubtedly have a reference to Christ's kingdom on earth, frequently so called, and in that sense Christ may be understood to declare, that such, even infants of such tender age, should be admitted into His visible church on earth; but I cannot doubt that Jesus carried His ascending thoughts onwards and upwards to that kingdom of glory in heaven, where infants should form so large and glorious a band of its happy inmates. There would be the holy innocents of Bethlehem; and all who, although they had exercised, and could exercise, no faith themselves in the Saviour, yet, in some mysterious way unknown to us and unseen by us, were redeemed by that Saviour's blood, and sanctified by His Spirit, and were made meet for, and are partakers of, that blessed inheritance with the saints in light. They assuredly have not sinned, as the apostle says, after the similitude of Adam's transgression; they assuredly are not defiled with the earth-born passions of their nature: in their mouth is found no guile; and therefore are they

without fault before the throne of God. "A little lower than the angels," yet almost of angelic nature, unstained by actual sin, and knowing nothing of the world, its sorrows or its sins, save only, perhaps, a few of its passing pains, they are transplanted at once from the ungenial soil and clime where they were for a moment placed, and are for ever safe in the home of that Shepherd who has gathered them in His arms, and will carry them in His bosom.*

SECTION LVI.

(Chapter xix. verses 16—23.)

THERE is something painfully affecting in the narrative of this young man, and few, I suspect, can read it without a sigh over the disappointed hope of that promising and early blossom, withering away and scorched up in the glare of this world's prosperity and pleasure. The young read it, and sigh over the self-denial which religion requires, and to think that heaven cannot be attained without sacrificing so large a portion of the world. Others again, in maturer years,

* This latter view of our Lord's reference to the actual inmates of heaven, from amid the ranks of babes and sucklings and tender infants, has been, I think it right to say, questioned by some of my brethren in the ministry; but let me ask, if the instinct of a mother's love, whose babe has blossomed and died, does not respond with an uplifted heart of thanksgiving to the truthfulness of such a supposition?

may read it, and, in reading, sigh over the history and the picture of their own lives,—how they, in early life, were earnest to know what they should do to inherit eternal life; how they, too, came to Jesus with a firm resolution to follow whithersoever He should lead them. A few years more, and the world had then gained a hold which it would not relax; business, and perhaps success in business, engrossed them, and, like the young man, they too have turned away sorrowful from the page which recounts the story, because it tells them they have that which they love better than the Saviour, and are unwilling to surrender.

Let us, however, go through the narrative more in detail. But remember, it is no parable, it is no fictitious story, which may, or may not, have had some foundation in truth; its incidents are not selected and put together by Jesus merely to illustrate some truth or doctrine. This young man actually lived, and came to Christ with the question here recorded; the conversation here detailed did take place; the young man did reject the Saviour's offer, did go away sorrowful, and, it may be, is even now repenting, with unavailing remorse, the fatal self-delusion of his worldly and riches-loving heart. It adds tenfold deeper interest to the narrative that it is a real one, and that this youth is not merely a sketch or a picture, but that he is an actual representation of a very large class in every age and in every station; for though the warning given, and the moral deduced, are for

the rich, yet even the very poorest may read a lesson in its incidents equally powerful and equally applicable to himself. I do not for a moment imagine that there was any hypocrisy in this young man; I believe he was as sincere in the question he proposed, as he was certainly reverential and humble in his manner of proposing it. The fact indeed is not mentioned, but I think we can hardly err in supposing that he was a Pharisee, and shared in all the self-righteous complacency of his sect. Like another "young man" of whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles, "whose name was Saul," he had, apparently, a great deal of that "confidence in the flesh" which the apostle recounts in his Epistle to the Philippians, though no doubt with much more of softness of manner, and winningness of character, than in the once fiery zealot and persecutor. The very question he asks betrays the delusion under which he laboured, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Eternal life, then, according to his creed, was something to be earned, something to be purchased, and he would fain know the price. Jesus answers him on his own ground. The law says, "This do, and thou shalt live,"—the law demands perfect, unswerving obedience to its commands: "Do this, keep the commandments in their spirit and their letter, and thou shalt live. Fulfil the law, and the law will bear you harmless." The young man, utterly unconscious of the Saviour's

meaning, next asks, "which commandments?" as if there were some of less importance than others, some that he might perhaps altogether omit; as if there were a single solitary point in which he could be deficient with impunity. As if the law then were lax in some point and stern in others, his question really is, "What are the particular commandments, by adhering faithfully to which, I may secure my title to eternal life?" It is remarkable that Jesus does not name the first and chief commandment of love to God; but, not to mention that it was a commandment most indelibly imprinted on every Jew's memory at least, however slightly it might be on his conscience, it is probable that our Lord confined his answer to the second table, that, even by that comparatively inferior test, He might lay bare his miserable and defective obedience to the spiritual and extended requirements of the law, closing it, however, with that touchstone which at once exposed the hollowness of his practice, and the reality of his self-delusion, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." And yet even this for the moment takes not the veil from his heart, but the rather encourages his self-delusion; for as he hears the enumeration of commandments, which, it may be, he had not in their letter broken, and which, with some at least, he could hardly have had much temptation to violate, thinking that he could not be far from the kingdom of heaven, and anticipating the

Saviour's approval, his reply is, "All these have I kept from my youth up." Well might another evangelist add, "Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him;" for there is something lovely in the sight of a young man, amid all the trials and temptations and attractions of the world, the vanities without and the passions within, walking resolutely in the path of God's commandments. He had done well to a certain extent, and he is anxious to do more: "What lack I yet?" Alas! now is the silver tried in the fire, and is found to be what the prophet calls "reprobate" or refuse silver, or, as another prophet calls it, the mere "dross of silver." He could not stand the test proposed; his faith, his love, his obedience, were all weighed in the balance, and found wanting. He went away "sorrowful;" but there is a sorrow of the world which worketh death, as well as a godly sorrow that worketh repentance to salvation. I presume not to lift the veil where Scripture has left it down. The young man, however, affords a melancholy illustration of our Lord's remark, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

SECTION LVII.

(Chapter xix. verse 23 to the end.)

We read in the preceding section the narrative of the rich young man who had come to Jesus, so earnestly desirous, to all appearance, to attain eternal life, yet turning away, sorrowfully indeed, but still effectually, from the Saviour who "loved him" and would have redeemed him. Our Lord's remark on this melancholy withdrawal of the youth is a very striking one: "A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven." We must not misunderstand the words: it is not a prohibition for the rich to enter into heaven; it is in no degree exclusion for them: it is not that there is a narrower entrance, a lower portal, or a steeper ascent into heaven for the one class more than for the other. No! heaven is as widely open for them as for others; the blood of Jesus would as equally cleanse the most defiled of them as of the poorest; the invitation is as broadly addressed to them as to the rest of mankind, "Ho! every one;" "Whosoever will, let him come;" "Him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out." This young man was not rejected of Jesus: he went away of his own accord; and the words of our Lord, taken in connection with the narrative, seem to intimate that the difficulties and hindrances in the way of the rich are not so much inevitable and insuperable obstacles, as

they are clogs, which they are unwilling to throw aside. They seem to imply that the rich so often encumber themselves with the effeminacies, and luxuries, and softnesses of a sensual and worldly life, are so habituated to the indulgence of self, and so little accustomed to self-control and self-denial, that they are but little fitted to endure that "hardness" which becomes a good soldier of Jesus Christ. They are, too, so wont to look upon the provision of to-day as emanating from sources within their own power, and at their immediate command, and, humanly speaking, liable to so little injury or risk of diminution, that, practically at least, they can feel and exercise but little dependence on that gracious and daily Benefactor who supplies and guards their store. A rich man no doubt holds everything at the will of God, and would readily acknowledge that he did so, but it is difficult to realize and live out the feeling in the daily circumstances of life. Can he, for instance, who knows that, humanly speaking, to-morrow will be as to-day, or, if there be any difference, only more abundant, can he utter the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," with the same feeling of dependence, the same fervour, the same craving, as the poor man who knows that he earns his daily bread by daily labour, and that an interruption of the one is the stoppage of the other? As the petition slides from the rich man's lips, he knows that his

table will be sumptuously spread with all that can tempt appetite, and that if it were not, irritation rather than resignation would be his feeling. I do not say (God forbid!) that a rich man cannot utter the words fervently, sincerely, dependently; many a one does, for the grace of God is not withheld from him; and though by and from himself it would be impossible, with God all things are possible; and I bless God that there are among the rich those who, as an old writer expresses it, have both "Esau's venison and Jacob's blessing;" but I would say, how hard for such to *feel* the prayer, while they utter the words! I am not now even alluding to those more saddening obstacles which wealth so often throws in the way of salvation, and on which so many "rich young men" make such utter, hopeless, irremediable shipwreck both for time and for eternity. They do not seem so naturally to arise out of this narrative, and we may therefore gladly pass them by; but I think, however startling, however solemn the conclusion, we must still say with our Lord, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven." What prayer, what watchfulness, what conflict, and what resistings of flesh and blood, and the natural man; what self-control and self-denial, what grace of God! and when at last brought safe to heaven, his exclamation must still be, as he scans the path he has trodden, "I am as a wonder."

It was perhaps a natural, but still, we think, a

somewhat arrogant boast, which Peter makes of his own and his fellow-disciples' sacrifices for the sake of Christ. There was, no doubt, a lurking vanity in the contrast which he insinuated between themselves and this young man, and there was assuredly as great ignorance in the claim which his question implied, as there was in the young man's conception of the requirements of the law. "We have forsaken all." Oh! what a poor boast! Lord! what is our all, to what Thou surrenderedst! Peter thought of his boat, his nets, and his little trade; he thought not of the bosom of the Father which Thou hadst quitted, the seraphim and cherubim and angelic host surrounding Thy throne on high. And yet with what compassionate, gracious tenderness does Jesus accept their little all, and with what abundant overflowing interest does He repay the scanty outlay! But the same love which led Him thus to accept and thus to reward the fidelity and devotion of His followers, led Him also to correct and crush an evil which had already begun to appear among them, and which, if unrepressed, would have tended to serious and fatal consequences. There had been evidences of a growing jealousy even among themselves, and Peter's question seemed now to indicate an assumption of superiority over others, which was but little consistent with the lowly bearing of a disciple of Jesus. He would crush the evil in its bud, and He therefore solemnly and empha-

tically declares that "many that are first shall be last, and many that are last shall be first;" that they must not for a moment imagine that priority of service entitled them to priority of reward, or that those rewards and wages were otherwise than at the free gift and sovereign disposal of Him, who alike bestowed the power and the will to serve, and accepted the service also.

SECTION LVIII.

(Chapter xx. verses 1—17.)

THIS parable of the labourers in the vineyard may be said to have a threefold application: first, to our Lord's disciples and the successive preachers and ministers of the gospel; secondly, to the admission of the Gentiles into the Church, and to their participation of equal privileges with the Jews; and lastly, it may be applied to human life in general, and to the different periods of youth, manhood, declining years, and to the very verge of the grave, on which men continue to trifle with the calls of the gospel. There are, no doubt, portions of the parable which can hardly be said to apply to each of these divisions in all their minute detail, some which apply to one more than another, and some which perhaps apply to none; but it is not necessary that a parable should dovetail, as it were, in all its bearings with the real circumstances of the case;

it is sufficient if in its general scope and bearing its meaning is intelligible and explicit; and we may truly say of this parable, that few can read it without making a personal and profitable application of it to their own case.

The remark with which our Lord concluded the last chapter, that "many that are first shall be last, and many that are last shall be first," and His concluding this parable with the very same words, evidently, I think, shows that our Lord intended it in the first instance as a warning and a rebuke to the somewhat arrogant anticipations of Peter and His other disciples, for their ready obedience to the Saviour's call, their early enlistment under His banner, and forming, as it were, the vanguard of His followers. The very promise made by their Master, that they should sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, whatever the meaning of the promise might be supposed to shadow forth, and however inapplicable to one at least of the twelve who heard it, might yet, in its indistinct visions of glory, give rise to much of jealousy and envy and heart-burning. Our Lord therefore pointedly pursues the theme of the last chapter, by illustrating the doctrine he wished to inculcate under the similitude of labourers hired to work in a vineyard at different periods of the day.

It was, no doubt, early in the morning when Jesus, as it were, hired, and sent into his vineyard, these, the first Christian labourers. It was

as yet an untilled soil; and though they worked for a season under the eye and instructions of their Master, yet He had plainly foretold them that He should soon be taken from them; and, though His departure should be the precursor of another Comforter whom He would send, yet their future service was to be a service of toil and danger, of hardships and sufferings, well portrayed by the phrase in the parable, of "the burden and heat of the day." Yet, even as regarded themselves, they were soon to be joined by other labourers, coming in at every hour, and sharing in the work they had so painfully commenced; and were they not to hold out the right hand of fellowship to them? or were they to look with a grudging and evil eye on each successive labourer that entered the vineyard, as if he were only sent to diminish their own well-earned reward and hire? If so, Peter, and James, and John, and the rest, might have looked askance on Paul; and Paul, in his turn, on Apollos, or Aquila, or Timothy, or Titus. These were called in at a later hour; and so it has been ever since. Every labourer, as he sees fresher and younger, and unworn and untired, successors hired one after another into the vineyard, may thankfully say what the Baptist said of himself, "He must increase, but I must decrease," and may hear their mutual Master say to each successive band, "Other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours." It was so even before the

apostles' time: patriarchs and prophets, and holy men of old, raised up of God from time to time, laboured in the field before them; others have laboured since, and others will labour still, till all be accomplished. It was a glorious draught which Peter's net drew to shore on the day of Pentecost, of "about three thousand souls;" it will be a still more glorious draught when "the earth shall be made to bring forth in one day," when "nations shall be born at once," and converts shall flock in "as the doves to the windows." The parable may here be said to close as regards these labourers; for, when the evening shall close in, and their Master calls one and all "to give them their hire," from Enoch and Noah, the first preachers of righteousness, down to the last and latest labourer, there will be no grudging, no repining, no murmuring over another's brighter crown, or whiter robe, or sweeter harp; but the mutual acknowledgment of each and all, as they cast their crowns before the throne, will be, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name be the praise and the glory ascribed!"

The Jews, indeed, did murmur at the admission of the Gentiles to the same privileges and the same equality with themselves. They long resisted it, and when Paul in his defence announced God's purpose of sending him to the Gentiles, they could not restrain their jealous fury, and cried out, "Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live." And

perhaps there are those at the present day who look with somewhat of contemptuous indifference and depreciating scorn on Missionary efforts, and on those who are from time to time called in to be members of Christ's Church from amid ignorant and idolatrous heathen, and who would shrink from calling an African a brother, or an Indian a fellow-heir with themselves. And yet of the first, old Fuller has well though quaintly spoken, when he called them "images of God carved in ebony;" and among the latter, the records of God's book will eventually disclose a faith, and walk, and conversation that may well put to shame many a white man's ampler but less-valued privileges; for we must remember, that of all these that are called in the parable, not one refuses; the instant they hear the offer, they accept it. They bargain not for terms; they take the householder at his word, "Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive;" and they go without hesitation or delay into the vineyard. There is not one alluded to who says, "I go, sir," but he went not; and even of those who were unemployed at the last hour, it was an excuse, at once admitted and accepted, that "no man had hired them;" and they too instantly and joyously obeyed the call. Can any one in Christian England really say, "No man hath hired me?" There may be, and there are, more abundant means of grace vouchsafed to some than to others; but not one, even the most benighted, can plead that he has acted up even to

the light he had; and this parable warns us, that God remembers and records the hours at which He calls, even though the labourer may refuse or disdain to be hired.

SECTION LIX.

(Chapter xx. verse 17 to the end.)

THE portion of Scripture which I have just read is a very painful and humiliating one, and affords a melancholy evidence of our fallen state. Our Lord, as you remember, had just been enforcing, and illustrating by a most striking and comprehensive parable, the declaration that "many that are first shall be last." He was led to this, as I mentioned, by a desire to check any rising pride in the minds of His disciples, by the promise He had given them, that "in the regeneration they should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The very next conversation we find Jesus holding with his disciples, must have almost immediately followed the preceding, and would, indeed, seem to have been suggested by the same earnest desire to correct any lingering misunderstandings as to the nature of His kingdom,—for He again begins to recapitulate with still more minute detail the sufferings, and indignities, and cruel death, which were to befall Him in Jerusalem, whither He was now hastening. Twice before had He dwelt on

the same topic; twice before had He warned them that they were following a Master whose kingdom was not only not of this world, but whose only inheritance on earth for himself and for them was a cross instead of a crown. And yet, scarcely had He finished the sad detail, ere the painful and incongruous scene is exhibited of two of his disciples, and, alas! too, aided and headed by their mother, petitioning for themselves the highest posts of honour and distinction in that future kingdom. And just consider who these two were—they were James and John, the latter honoured with the significant title of "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and both peculiarly favoured and distinguished by their Master. There would seem, however, to have been somewhat of conscious shame in their manner of making the request. They put their mother forward as their mouthpiece, as if a mother's love, a mother's wishes, or a mother's commands, had overruled their own better feeling, and they had yielded to her ambitious views. And even in that mother's manner there is somewhat of hesitation, as if unwilling to state at first the extent of her desire; or, it may be, in her ignorance, desiring to extort a promise from Jesus, without His knowing what her request would be!

It was, indeed, a bold and presumptuous petition; they could have known but little of the nature of that kingdom, to the highest dignities of which they thus aspired, where "the elders

that are before the throne" are described as falling down before Him that sitteth on the throne, and casting their crowns before the throne, and saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power." As that vision in after years met the eye of the beloved disciple, with what saddened feelings of shame and regret must the poor exile in Patmos have thought of the day when he made that ill-advised and ignorant request, that he and his brother might sit, the one on the right hand, and the other on the left, in their Master's kingdom. And yet there was a germ, a blade, as it were, of faith mingled with their ignorance; their Master had, indeed, told them of torture and death, and of being delivered to the Gentiles, and crucified, and slain, but He had also spoken of a glorious triumph on the third day, when He should rise again. They pass over the shame, and through the agonies of the cross to the certainty of a coming kingdom. And our Lord's rebuke to them is so full of gentleness and tenderness, and though He reproves their presumption, yet so touchingly alludes to that love which should hereafter prompt them to drink of His cup of sorrow, and be baptized with His baptism of blood, that, in that spirit of mercy which would not quench the smoking flax nor bruise the broken reed, He seems to forgive the pride that dictated, in the faith that prompted their request. But what were the feelings of the rest at this pain-

ful exhibition? Did they sorrow over a brother's fall, or hasten to plead in his behalf? Alas, no! "when the ten heard it, they were filled with indignation against the two brethren," and I fear their indignation arose chiefly from the supposition that their own ambitious views had been forestalled by their shrewder and more worldly-wise companions, and that their resentment was not so much for their Master as for themselves. Our Lord does not declare that admission into His kingdom should not be given to these supplicants, however premature or presumptuous their request; nor does He limit His own power, as if He exercised only a delegated sway. There are, indeed, boundaries which even Omnipotence cannot pass, and there are certain limits within which admission into heaven is confined. God cannot deny Himself; God cannot act contrary to His word, His truth, His justice; and so the Son here says of admission into His kingdom, "It is not mine to give, *except* to those ordained, elected, and made meet for the inheritance. The Father's will is my will,—it is not His will that heaven should be set open to the proud or the overbearing, nor is it mine; it is not His will that one of His little ones should perish, nor is it mine. Leave, then, these poor thoughts of pre-eminence and vainglory to earthly potentates and their satellites, and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly, and my mission on earth is to be myself a servant, and 'to give my life a ransom for many.'"

SECTION LX.

(Chapter xxi. verses 1—17.)

JESUS was drawing nigh not only to Jerusalem, but to the close of his earthly course, and we now see a manifest difference attending all His actions. Before, He courted privacy, now He would have publicity: in the earlier periods of His ministry, He had withdrawn Himself from the gaze and gratitude of men. He not unfrequently took the objects of His mercy apart to be healed, and charged them that they should tell no man; we now find Him in the very temple, surrounded by friends and foes, healing both "the lame and the blind." We see Him avowedly entering Jerusalem, not, indeed, as a conqueror, nor with much of worldly pomp, but still assuredly in triumphant procession. He not only permits and accepts, as His rightful due, the homage and acclamations of the attendant crowds, but He claims, and takes steps to claim, their acknowledgment of Him as the predicted Messiah, the very King whom their prophet, Zechariah, had foretold more than 500 years before should enter Jerusalem in the very way in which Jesus did actually enter it. There are several of the prophecies relative to our Lord which are so singular in their circumstances, and so minute in their details, that, on any other ground than that they were the utterance and inspiration of

Him to whom the Past, the Present, and the Future are equal and alike, they would almost seem to be the reckless assertions of hardihood or folly. They are, no doubt, most easy, most credible, most triumphant, inasmuch as they are the declarations of inspired prophecy, and their fulfilment came from God Himself; and yet the very minuteness of their details, and the almost casual nature of their incidents, so liable to be broken in upon and defeated by a thousand accidents, seemed almost, as it were, to invite disappointment and failure. But, blessed be God, not one jot nor one tittle passed away unfulfilled. It was, indeed, a most continuous texture of prophecy from first to last, which was to be spread over this period of our Lord's visit to Jerusalem, till His resurrection from the grave; it was, so to speak, like His own coat, for which the soldiers cast lots,—"without seam, woven from the top throughout;" and this one heads the series. As Jesus drew nigh to Jerusalem, or, rather, as He was already entering its suburbs, "knowing that all things which were written in the prophets concerning Him should be accomplished," He sends forward two of His disciples on this most singular mission, and which was most extraordinarily fulfilled, so that, in full accordance with the prediction, Jesus enters Jerusalem, "meek and lowly," and yet in triumph, as her King. Well might the Daughter of Zion and her sons shout and rejoice, for her King was indeed come; and the

very acclamations of the multitudes, as they strewed His path with their garments, and branches from the trees, were the very words of their own Psalmist, in which he so emphatically refers to the Messiah as "the Head-stone of the Corner." Jerusalem was indeed moved to her inmost depths; all things animate and inanimate, rational and irrational, were blended in one uplifted song of praise, as if in fulfilment of that prediction of the evangelical prophet, "The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands;" and so the hills round about Jerusalem re-echoed to the shoutings of her children, and the very trees lent their branches to make ready a highway for their God.

It was no insignificant nor unmeaning act which Jesus proceeded to execute on his entering Jerusalem. It was but natural that He should at once go to His Father's house, and still more natural that He should be grieved and offended at the sight that met His eye. He had once before, at the beginning of His ministry, witnessed the same unseemly sight, and with holy indignation had rebuked the desecrators of His Father's house; but the rebuke had fallen on callous hearts, and they had soon returned, like the unclean animal to its wallowing in the mire. "Judgment must begin," says an apostle, "at the house of God;" and it was an apt and signifi-

cant emblem, as well as warning, of the cleansing which the whole nation needed, that Jesus so pointedly rebuked these profaners of His and His Father's house; and it is a profitable lesson which the apostle draws for our edification, "If judgment begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" or, as St. Paul argues, "Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee." Jerusalem, indeed, heeded not her lesson, she knew not the things belonging to her peace. The chief priests and scribes, alone unmoved amid the wonders, and unimpressed by the signs which gathered round them on every side, were only "filled with displeasure," and remonstrated with Jesus, and would have had Him repress the acclamations of the people. But priest, and scribe, and people, and city, and temple have long since been swept away; desolation, and widowhood, and loss of children, have come upon Jerusalem, and the Daughter of Zion "sits alone and weeps." "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off."

SECTION LXI.

(Chapter xxi. verses 17—23.)

It is quite unnecessary to take any notice of those worse than foolish cavils which have been levelled against this act of our Lord in causing the barren fig-tree to wither away; such as, that He exhibited an angry impatience in cursing a fruit-tree, because it had no fruit on it to satisfy His hunger; or, that He unduly interfered with another's property. These are the cavils of profaneness, and may well be left unnoticed. At the same time, I would observe, that the heading in our Bibles, in the epitome prefixed to this chapter, referring to this incident, strikes on my own sense as both offensive and erroneous. It is, "Christ curseth the fig-tree." We know that the phrase, "the curse of barrenness," is not unfrequently applied, and may be, in that sense, deemed sufficiently appropriate and expressive; but I cannot help thinking that our heading in this chapter, as regards this matter, has misled many well-meaning persons, and afforded a handle to the irreverent scorner. And as these portions are altogether of man's production, I confess I wish this one were altogether expunged. It might be easily altered into "The doom of the barren fig-tree," and that would just as thoroughly and impressively lead us to the lesson which Jesus meant to teach both to the Jewish nation, and to us of a

later age, under this apt and significant emblem of a fruitless fig-tree being no longer permitted to cumber the ground. It was indeed an apt representation of the Jewish nation at the time of our Lord's dwelling upon the earth. What more could have been done to that vineyard of the Lord, that He had not done in it? From the earliest period He had tended, and nurtured, and watched over it. He himself declares of it, "From the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them;" how sorrowfully He adds, "And yet they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck, and did worse than their fathers." And now at the close of this dispensation of mercy, He comes seeking fruit, and, finding none, He pronounces the solemn doom which He had before denounced by His prophet, "Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground, and it shall burn and shall not be quenched." It was a fearful, but still a righteous doom; and yet there was to be eventually mercy even for Judah, as a nation and a people. The sentence on the barren fig-tree was, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever," and it instantly withered away, and no fruit has since grown, nor can grow on it for ever; but for Judah there is a predicted day at hand when Israel shall

once more "blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit."

Let us, however, now turn to the lesson, still more awful and impressive, which it teaches to ourselves, because the barren, fruitless Christian (if we may use such an anomaly), when once cut down, can spring up no more. "There *is* hope of a tree," says Job, even "if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch will not cease," but for the barren, fruitless professor there is none; "as that tree falleth, so will it lie:" "the hope of the hypocrite shall perish." This fig-tree represents a very fearful class, not the outwardly profligate, the avowedly immoral and profane: no one goes to them looking for fruit; but it represents those who, like the Pharisees and scribes of our Saviour's day, make a great profession of godliness, have a goodly show of leaves upon their branches, and, to the casual glance of the passer-by, look green and flourishing;—but "the deep searchings of God" go far beyond this. He not only expects fruit, but He looks for it on every individual tree: He comes to it, and searches beneath its leaves; He looks into the heart, and examines there the hidden, secret motives of human action. We might, perchance, imagine that in some vast and almost interminable forest one or more of the lowlier trees would be passed by or overlooked; and so it might, if He who searched had limited powers; but He who searches is He who has planted, and who de-

mands of every tree, that it be a fruit-bearing tree, and has left us a rule of good culture, which can never fail, "As the branch cannot bear fruit, except it abide in the vine, so neither can ye except ye abide in Me." On earth there may be something that looks like promise: from a distance Jesus augured favourably of this tree,—it had leaves on it, and therefore had the principle of growth within it; it was not yet dried up and withered: the doom of eternal barrenness had not yet passed the Saviour's lips; but in hell, there is not even the sign of vegetation. It was a poor covering which Adam made for himself and Eve, when he sewed fig-leaves together to hide their wickedness; but, in that place of torment, not even leaves will be found: all will be naked, uncovered, unconcealed sin and misery there.

SECTION LXII.

(Chapter xxi. verses 23—32.)

THE open and uncompromising manner in which our Lord was now acting, the homage paid Him by the multitudes on His triumphant entry into Jerusalem the day before, His indignant remonstrance on the profanation of His Father's House, His assuming to Himself the right of cleansing that "den of thieves," and the submission with which His authority had been obeyed, all tended to evidence that Jesus was

now openly putting forward higher and more undoubted claims than he had hitherto avowed—that He was in reality the predicted One, whom the prophet had announced. We must remember, moreover, that all this was taking place in Jerusalem, the great resort of all that was eminent, or noble, or learned, the residence of the Roman governor, the abode of the high priest, the seat of the Sanhedrim, or great council of the nation. There must undoubtedly have been a peculiar awe and sanctity around the holy Jesus during these few eventful days; for though we know that the chief rulers were excited to the utmost height of anger and indignation against Him, and would without scruple have availed themselves of any means to remove so hated an opponent, yet not a hand is uplifted against Him, not a finger is stirred to His injury. His hour, though so nigh at hand, was not yet come; and till it was, God said to the stormy waves even of Jewish fury, "Be still."

There is a striking instance of this "stilling the madness of the people," in the manner in which the chief priests and elders came to Jesus on this occasion, and asked him, "By what authority doest thou these things?" We may indeed say, with the Psalmist, "Their words were smoother than butter, but war was in their hearts;" and our Lord, therefore, in that wisdom of the serpent, which He had enjoined on His disciples, replies to their question by another

question, and a question so framed, that in whichever way it was answered, it must condemn themselves, "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" They themselves had acknowledged John as a prophet and a righteous man: for numbers both of Pharisees and Sadducees had gone to his baptism, and attended his preaching. And here was the dilemma. John was a prophet, even by their own admission; John had explicitly and distinctly pointed to Jesus as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;" why, then, not acknowledge Jesus as they acknowledged John? Alas! how easy is it to listen to truth, to applaud truth, and to think we approve truth; but the moment it touches an unsubdued sin, or presses on a favourite prejudice, or interferes with some endeared interest, then truth itself becomes hateful to us, and we try to reject it, or, at least, harden ourselves against it. And yet these priests and elders dared not deny John's divine mission,—his memory was still too recent and too dear among the people. They therefore hesitated not to give utterance to a falsehood, to cover their own duplicity and insure their own safety, and declared that they could not tell. It was in righteous retribution that Jesus answered, "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things." It had been His own caution to His disciples, "Take heed how ye hear, for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and who-

soever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." At the same time He would condemn them out of their own mouth, and proceeded therefore to depict their own infatuated hardness of heart, and the more docile spirit of those whom they despised as unholy and outcast, under the parable of two sons, ordered by their father to go and work in his vineyard. The elder son—representing the openly wicked, the publican, and harlot, and sinner—at first irreverently refused his father's command, and said, "I will not;" but he afterwards saw and confessed his sin, and, as the first proof of his repentance, went and laboured in his father's vineyard. The second son—representing the specious, plausible, professing Pharisee, with obedience and deference on his lips, and disobedience and rebellion in his heart—hypocritically replies, "I go, sir;" but he went not. Like those to whom the parable was addressed, we, too, can have no difficulty in deciding which of the twain did his father's will, nor in assenting to the inference which our Lord draws, that publicans and sinners, however vile in their lost estate, however far from God, and dead in trespasses and sins, are yet, through the grace of God leading them to repentance, and through the cleansing and sanctifying of the Holy Spirit, more ready and docile recipients of God's mercy than the barren, plausible professor, who sits under the means of grace and yet denies his

need; who hears his own natural character as an outcast and an alien described from the word of God, and from the preacher's lips, and applies it all to his neighbour; who, to all the precepts, invitations, and commands of the gospel, may yield the ready assent of the lips, or even the understanding, and reply, "I go, sir," but does *not* in reality go; who may perhaps, like Herod, do many things gladly at the bidding of John, but will not surrender Herodias; like those of whom the Apostle speaks, "They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him." Far happier, then, the contrite publican, and the broken-hearted harlot, lying low at the feet of Jesus, and alike smiting on their breast, and saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" but far happier still, those who set out early to seek the Lord, and have realized the Lord's promise, "They that seek me early shall find me."

SECTION LXIII.

(Chapter xxi. verse 33 to the end.)

We have here a more extended illustration of our Lord's sentence on the barren fig-tree. He had come to that tree seeking fruit thereon, and finding none, He had doomed it to irrevocable barrenness. What He then denounced on the literal tree, He here applies to the whole Jewish nation. The figure of a vineyard is a very

frequent and favourite one among the sacred writers. We had it last in the parable of the two sons; we now have it again in this parable of the householder planting a vineyard and letting it out to husbandmen, and at the appointed seasons sending successive servants to receive the fruit of it. As it referred to the Jewish nation, it was so strikingly applicable in all its parts, even to the minutest incidents, that one only wonders that our Lord's hearers, as they heard these cutting truths, were not stung to the very quick, and did not, as they afterwards did in the case of Stephen, "gnash upon him with their very teeth." But no doubt their hands were stayed till the appointed hour. We must not, however, suppose that this, or any of our Lord's discourses, were solely addressed to those who actually heard them; or that, because their primary application was to one, and that an immediate object, they had therefore no ulterior reference to ourselves. God, it is true, denounces His "sore judgments" on nations, for their national abuse of the various privileges and mercies vouchsafed them; and the vineyard here represented is no doubt the house of Judah. Most abundant had been their privileges, most conspicuous their mercies. The Lord had not dealt so with any nation as He had dealt with theirs, nourishing it, and keeping it even as the apple of His eye. But from the very earliest period they had never rendered unto Him ac-

cording to the great things He had done unto them. He had sent His servants to warn and to instruct; and they had beaten, killed, and stoned one after another. He had now sent unto them His own beloved Son; and in a few days they would fill up the measure of their iniquities, and cast Him out, and crucify Him.

But are nations the only vineyards of the Lord of Hosts? Is it to them only that He vouchsafes privileges and means of grace, and from them only that He expects return? No: each individual that lives is a vineyard planted by the Lord. My soul is a vineyard of the Lord of Hosts—yours is a vineyard too; and in this Christian land we may say, at least of ourselves, What more could have been done that the Lord hath not done to each one of our respective vineyards? He has from our earliest years placed us in the very midst of the means of grace, "in green pastures, and beside the still waters." We have had Christian parents, and Christian instructors. Has He not hedged us round by our covenant of Baptism, by our voluntary renewal of that pledge and promise at our Confirmation, and by all the ties and endearments of home, as well as the restrictions of society? and at each appointed season He has looked for its respective fruits. He has come to you in childhood, and has expected the fruits of childhood's season. He has looked for growth corresponding with the nurture you have received,

and for those holy tempers, and docile dispositions, and that obedience of love, which He so approved when He bade His disciples become as little children. Do you think that there are no graces peculiar to childhood,—no fruits which Jesus loves and would fain gather?—is there no anxious tenderness as to how the young shoots in His vineyard are going on? Listen to His own description of Himself, as saying, "Let us get up early to the vineyards, let us see if the vine flourish, whether *the tender grape* appear, and the pomegranates *bud* forth." Depend upon it,

> "A flower when offered in the bud
> Is no mean sacrifice."

He has sent, too, for the fruit of His vineyard in the season of youth; and oh, what an abundant crop ought He to gather at that season of energy, vitality, and growth! but, alas! how often has He, at such a season, come to His vineyard, and found only disappointment and sorrow! how often has Jesus looked on some young one of His flock, and, looking, "loved him," and has afterwards had to say, as the Apostle Paul of Demas, "He hath forsaken me, having loved this present world"! And shall I exclude the aged, as if Jesus looked for no fruit on them,—as if the sap of godliness had ceased to flow, and, in the course of nature, they were only to wither and decay? The natural tree, indeed, decays and

ceases to bring forth fruit; but not so with "the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord." "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God; they shall bring forth *fruit in old age*." Once a fruit-bearer in Christ, always a fruit-bearer. Be firmly "rooted," then, "in Christ;" abide in Him, as the branch abideth in the vine; and then, at whatever season He may come, or send, He will not be disappointed of His expectations. Remember the alternative,—if it bear fruit, well; but if not, thou also, as well as the Jewish nation, shall be cut down and rooted out.

SECTION LXIV.

(Chapter xxii. verses 1—14.)

The last parable represented the *hardness* of men's hearts; the present one, of the marriage supper, represents the *deceitfulness* of man's heart, and the evasions and excuses to which he has recourse to justify his rejection of God's gracious invitations. In the former parable, he openly rejected and defied the message; in the present one, he makes light of it, and goes his way to more attractive invitations. In the former, it was Pharaoh's answer—"Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" in this latter, it is Felix's reply—"When I have a convenient

season, I will send for thee." Both are equally affronting and dishonouring to God; both are equally ruinous and fatal to man. They are both equally broad and direct roads to hell, and we may add, alas! many there be that are walking in them both. In its preliminary signification, this parable, like the preceding, refers to the Jewish nation: to them were the offers of salvation first made—to them the messengers of mercy first sent. "Go ye to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," was the injunction given to the servants sent to bid them to the wedding: "Go *not* into the way of the Gentiles, enter *not* into any city of the Samaritans," was the prohibition annexed. Nor were those the only, or the earliest, messengers; from the first call of Israel as a nation, God had sent them message after message, invitation upon invitation, and they had made light of it. He had more recently sent them John the Baptist, and His own immediate followers and commissioned apostles, and they had made light of them. He had come Himself, and they had equally turned away in contempt, and said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"—"Is not this the carpenter's son?" So they made light of all,—of prophets, and apostles, and of the Son of God Himself, and were therefore to be rejected of God in their turn, deprived of their inheritance, and despoiled of their city, their temple, and every privilege they had enjoyed. But are God's purposes of mercy to be frustrated

by man's wickedness? Shall God prepare His feast, and there be not guests to sit down and partake of the rich and abundant provision? No: they, indeed, which were first bidden were not worthy; but is "the Most High limited" in His resources? As John said to the Jews, "I tell you that God is able of the very stones to raise up children unto Abraham;" so, from the very lanes and hedgerows, and highways and by-ways of human life, wherever souls are perishing, there will the mercy of the Lord reach; and from among the abased and despised of the world shall the wedding be furnished with guests. The rejection of the Jews was indeed riches to the Gentiles.

But let us now apply the parable to ourselves. It is very possible that in our hearts we may be preferring something of this world to Christ; our thoughts, our anxieties, our energies may be more devoted and given up to "our farm," or "our merchandise," our worldly pursuit or occupation, whatever it may be, than to the care of our souls, and things of time take precedence of things of eternity. I cannot say how this may be, for outwardly we are all like the guests already entered, and seated at the King's table. There is no visible difference among us, any more than there was among them. We have all assumed a Christian name,—we have all enlisted ourselves as Christian soldiers under the same banner,—the same pledges, the same promises and

vows, have alike passed our lips, and at this moment at least, you are virtually saying to me, as Cornelius said to Peter: "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." And yet there may be a most fearful difference. Suppose yon door were to open, and the King now to come in, and cast His eye around this room, would He find us all alike clothed in the wedding robe of His Son's righteousness, and the white garment of His Spirit's holiness? or on which would that eye rest, as naked before Him? But why do I say, suppose? That eye is already in this room, it is already scanning every heart, and reading every thought. And yet even this reality ought to cause us no surprise, no terror: for that eye will be equally over us, when we go to our chambers, and when we quit them to-morrow to resume the business of the day. There is no sin in attending to "our farm, and our merchandise;" the sin is in preferring them before God, and the danger is in allowing them more than is their due. It is God's will and appointment that we should do our duty in that station of life to which He has called us; it is His command that we be "not slothful in business," it is "His blessing that maketh rich;" but we should search narrowly and closely into our own hearts, as to what are really the objects of our preference, as well as our confidence. Man may go on to the close, and pass muster amid his fellow guests; he may be

honoured, and welcomed, and approved among them; and though, perhaps, an occasional shudder may have thrilled through his heart, when he thought of death, "and after death of the judgment," yet he may at last have brought himself to say, with Agag, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." God may *seem* to have forgotten—to have overlooked; but God is not mocked, and God neither slumbers nor sleeps; and that unsleeping eye will turn and look on him, as it looked on Peter, to convince him of his sin; but not, as it did on Peter, to put away his sin. "Bind him hand and foot," will be the fearful, irrevocable sentence, and "Take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

SECTION LXV.

(Chapter xxii. verses 15—22.)

It is painful to think of the pertinacity with which malice will hunt down its prey. In the 118th Psalm, which is so strikingly predictive of Christ, He is represented as saying of his enemies, "They compassed Me about like bees;" and of one in particular, "Thou hast thrust sore at Me, that I might fall;" and surely never was there a figure more aptly applied, or more accurately fulfilled, than in the portion of Scripture which I have now read, and in the remainder of the

chapter. Pharisees, and Herodians, and Sadducees—men of the most opposite principles and tenets—hovering around Jesus in the vain and impotent attempt to sting and wound! They had attempted to elicit from Him an avowal of the authority on which He acted in all that He had done and said since He had entered Jerusalem; but He had refused to satisfy their inquiry, and now they contrive a snare from which they think it impossible that He can escape. It was indeed shrewdly laid; and one can imagine the eager malice of these hypocritical inquirers, as they pressed around Jesus, and, with seeming reverence and plausible expressions of homage and regard, asked for a solution of a difficulty which they would represent as burdensome to their consciences. It was a question, too, in which the people at large were deeply interested, and would no doubt be as eager as themselves for the answer of Jesus. "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?" Apparently a most simple question, but of most deep-laid subtlety and malignity. Had Jesus decided that the tribute was a lawful one, he would by that decision have sanctioned Cæsar as the rightful sovereign of the land, in opposition to that law of Moses, which had forbidden any but of their own nation to rule over them. And, what would have given far more umbrage to the people, He would have sanctioned also a galling and oppressive tribute, and acknowledged Cæsar's right as a conqueror to demand

it from a subjugated province. To answer, then, in Cæsar's favour, would at once, they hoped, destroy the favourable impression which the people had of Jesus, and would turn their homage and applause into bitterness and reviling. Had He answered it against Cæsar, as perhaps, judging from their own hearts, they hoped He would, they would instantly have denounced Him, as indeed they actually did a few days afterwards, as a traitor to the government, and as "forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar." It might have been enough for Jesus to have answered in their own words, "I cannot tell;" or, as He did on a former occasion, "Who made me a ruler and a judge over you?" But these Pharisees and Herodians, though they meant it not, had truly designated Jesus as one who taught the way of God in truth, and who cared not for any man; that is, who would not be diverted from the truth by the fear of man, which bringeth a snare. He therefore answers this question, or rather compels them to answer their own inquiry, and closed the conference with one of those weighty and impressive truths, which were not more instructive to those who heard them first, than they are to ourselves, and have been to every successive generation. We shall perhaps lose the immediate point with which our Lord spoke it, unless we remember that the Pharisees were the objectors to the tax, under the pretence that it violated the law of Moses, and dishonoured God; the Herodians, on the con-

trary, were advocates of the tax, and of Cæsar's authority, as it was from and through Cæsar that Herod himself received his power; but they were at the same time notoriously lax and infidel in their practice as well as creed. We may well imagine, then, the rebuke, which must have stung each one to the quick, as he handed back Cæsar's coin to the Pharisees, and said, "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's;" and then, turning to the Herodians, added, "and to God the things that are God's." I have said it is an impressive lesson to ourselves. It is, in fact, the summary of the ten commandments, and teaches us our duty to God, and our duty to our neighbour; they are united in God's law and in God's sight. Man often attempts to separate them, and thinks them perfectly distinct the one from the other; but what God hath joined, we must not put asunder. He who renders to God his due, must of necessity render to man the things that are his; and he who defrauds man, is at the same time defrauding God. Are we rendering to both their due?—to our sovereign, loyalty—to our superiors, respect—to our equals, courtesy—to our inferiors, kindness—or, as the apostle writes, and possibly in reference to this very observation of our Lord's, do we "render unto all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour"? Is our "love without dissimulation"? Are we "kindly affectioned one to another, with

brotherly love in honour preferring one another?" And does it all spring from its true and only source, love to God? for this is the commandment that we have from Him, that "if we love God, we love our brother also."

SECTION LXVI.

(Chapter xxii. verses 23—33.)

WHEN our Lord announced that startling assertion, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven!" His disciples in astonishment asked, "Who then can be saved?" The reply of Jesus was the safest and most satisfactory solution of that and of every difficulty, "With God all things are possible." We err, because we consider not the power of God. It is easy for infidelity to imagine difficulties, and propose ensnaring questions, and it may not be easy at the moment to give a satisfactory reply; but, "with God all things are possible," removes every doubt, and puts to flight every suggestion of the Evil One. It was no doubt an idle question which these Sadducees here proposed to Jesus; but it had a far deeper meaning than its general bearing implied, and the circumstances on which they grounded their inquiry were intended to strike at the root of all religion, and by what is well known in argument, reducing a question to absurdity, they would

throw a scorn and scoff on the most sacred and holy truths. I have before mentioned that the Sadducees were the unbelievers of that age, and they especially denied the doctrine of the resurrection. They acknowledged the authority of the five books of Moses, but not of the rest of Scripture, and they had the less hesitation in receiving these, because there is in them no explicit revelation of the doctrine of a resurrection. It can be, I think, most clearly inferred from a variety of passages in those five books, and our Lord here unanswerably demonstrates it from one; but still, there is no doubt that the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead was not distinctly enunciated, though it was implied, by Moses. It formed no part of the revelation Moses was commissioned to disclose to men; the patriarchs no doubt believed it, and died in the blessed hope and assurance of it, and bequeathed that hope to those who followed; but it was not then to be the subject of a distinct revelation. The Sadducees are not the only unbelievers who have laid hold on this fact to throw discredit on this great fundamental truth of all religion; and I can, even at this distant day, call to mind the painful feeling with which, in my earliest youth, an unbeliever once suggested to my mind a doubt on this very point, by challenging me to find a passage that stated it throughout the whole Pentateuch. Let me earnestly caution you, that should you unhappily be thrown into any society, or intercourse

with any one, though it were one dear to you as your own bosom, who would insinuate unbelief, or instil a doubt as to any truth of Scripture, or, in these days, I would add, of the truth and inspiration of Scripture itself—any one who, by a side-wind of ridicule, should attempt to throw discredit on any statement of the Bible, instantly to repel it, as it is in reality the suggestion of the Evil One. Say, with the holy indignation of your blessed Saviour, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God." It was probably a favourite story which these Sadducees had invented for their purpose, and had perhaps often proposed, and with success, to unwary and inexperienced disputants. It is so easy, as I have said before, to suggest a doubt, to hint suspicion, to instil unbelief, under the assumed spirit of candid inquiry, that one can well believe these Sadducees had found this story of theirs, of the seven brethren, a very efficacious instrument of embarrassment and puzzle to an inexperienced reasoner; and they therefore come to Jesus in the confident hope that so artful a proposition would baffle even Him. They might well have learned a lesson of distrust from the answer so immediately before given to the Pharisees and Herodians, respecting the tribute money; but the very flippancy of the mode in which they propose the question to Jesus betrays the self-conceit which actuated them. Let us, however, thank God that He did permit

these Sadducees to ask this bold and irreverent question; their unbelief is the confirmation of our faith, and our Lord has deduced, and left on record, a lesson which may well give light to them that sit in darkness, and guide our feet into the way of peace. Is it nothing to us to know that those who are departed hence in the Lord, are not, as the Sadducees would say, sleeping the sleep of eternal death? is it nothing to know of those holy men of old, the patriarchs and friends of God, that they all died in faith, and though they had not received the promises on earth, but were pilgrims and strangers here, yet that they have now entered upon their inheritance in glory, and as God *was* their God here, so *is* He their God still, and for ever? Is it nothing to us that Jesus has in mercy lifted up the veil that shrouds that other home from our earthly sight, and given us a more than glimpse of the state of its blessed inmates? Those earthly ties of human union, on which dissolution and decay are so legibly and sadly written, which are so mingled with sorrow, anxiety, and apprehension, exist not there. It is on earth, and amid earth's impurities and imperfections, that men "eat and drink, and buy and sell, and plant, and marry, and are given in marriage;" but "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." In heaven, every desire is holy, every imagination pure, every joy spiritual. The tie that links the husband and

the wife, the parent and the child, the brother and the sister, the friend and the friend, or the pastor and his flock, is no longer called by those earthly names, which betoken weakness and separation. In heaven is no decay; no inhabitant thereof shall say, "I am sick;" no eye shall look on a fading, drooping, loved one, and think of the approaching parting, but all will be as the angels of God, spiritual, refined, and holy. Every affection, transplanted from earth, and purified from earth's dross, like the predicted light of the sun, shall be seven-fold, but all centreing in the same object, that God may be all in all. Let us bless God, then, for this question of the Sadducees.

SECTION LXVII.

(Chapter xxii. verses 34—40.)

It is quite refreshing to escape from so much of captious and malicious interrogation on the part of the Sadducees and Pharisees, to this question of the expounder of the Law of Moses. It is indeed said here, that this man made the inquiry, "tempting him;" but, from the accounts left us of the same incident in the other Evangelists, we can have little doubt that the inquiry was made in no frivolous, and certainly in no treacherous or unkind spirit. It is to this very scribe that Jesus said on this occasion, as we

learn from St. Mark's Gospel, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God;" and it is therefore impossible to suppose that he could be actuated by any of the motives which had brought Pharisees, and Sadducees, and Herodians in such hostile array against Jesus. It was a question, indeed, much disputed among the theologians of that day, which was the first and chief commandment, and various opinions had been given and maintained on the subject; some upholding the law of "sacrifices," some of "circumcision," some of "the Sabbath," and some descending so low as to outward "ablutions and purifications." It is sad, that in all ages there have ever been fierce and angry disputations on points of a like kind: men have loved to dwell with punctilious minuteness, and to affix undue importance to minor and mere ceremonious observances, and to speak with acrimonious bitterness and unkindly spirit of all who see not every thing in the same light as themselves. These are, as our Lord stigmatized the Pharisees in the next chapter, scrupulous about the "mint, and anise, and cummin," and care less about the weightier and more important matters of "judgment, mercy, and faith." So these disputants, in their eagerness to carry their own point, put altogether out of sight that love to God, which would have led them first to seek His glory and honour, and, as regarded Jesus at least, were exhibiting only the worst and most malevolent feelings of our nature, and

in the very eagerness of their dispute, forgetting the point for which they were disputing. It was a wise step of this scribe, therefore, that he came at once to Jesus. Though himself an expounder of the law, and apparently, from our Lord's commendation, well instructed, he sought truth from the Source of Truth; he went not to Talmud or tradition, to priest or doctor of the law, but he went at once to Jesus. This lawyer had in all probability been present at the previous inquiries of the Pharisees and Herodians first, and then of the Sadducees; and he might well have been among those who "marvelled," and who "were astonished" at our Lord's answer; and may have thought this a fair opportunity, not, indeed, to "tempt" him, but to "try" and gain a decided answer on so interesting, though litigated a point, from one so well acquainted with the Word of God. Jesus never refused an answer to one who sought in sincerity to know the truth. He refused, indeed, a sign to those who demanded one in a spirit of infidelity. He had replied, to those who asked Him "By what authority doest thou these things?" "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things;" but He here instantly satisfies the doubts and enlightens the mind of the honest and candid inquirer.

It may, indeed, at first sight appear to need no revelation to tell us that we should love God above all things. Of such a golden truth we might at once say that there was no need of one

to ascend into heaven, or descend into the deep, to bring it to us, and we might be inclined to think that it was nigh, even in our hearts as well as in our mouths. But, alas! it is just that truth which the natural man not only receiveth not, and understandeth not, but which he actually rejects and repudiates. It never entered into the heart of man to love God; the natural feeling of every carnal, unregenerate heart is "enmity against God." Its first impression, when a thought of God enters the heart, is dread: "I was afraid, and I hid myself;" or a still more repelling feeling, like those of old: "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." The love of God in man's heart must be a new creation; the creation of Him who in the beginning moved over the dark and turbid face of the waters. The "love of God" must be "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost." Is it a plant of earth's growth? Alas! no. Go to-morrow into any of the more benighted streets, and courts, and alleys of London, and will you trace in the looks of those you see, one feature of that love to God, which, like God's peace, passeth all understanding? Go into the crowded marts of traffic, or the resorts of the fashionable, and do you think that if each heart was as open to you as it is before God, you would read the lines of love there? Nay, come into our own little parish, and shall we find there that love of God of which Jesus speaks? Nay, let us not go even so far; let us confine ourselves to

this room, and to one heart alone in it—our own—and do you think we shall find that love of God, which loveth always and above all things? Alas, how often do God's children, even with, and notwithstanding, a principle of grace within, find their love waxing cold, through some influence from the world and sin! How often have they need to say, with that bard of sorrow who went so heavily all his days!

> "Where is the blessedness I knew,
> When first I sought the Lord?
> Where is the soul-reviving view,
> Of Jesus and His Word?"

At the passover, the Jews were commanded in the law "to have no leaven in all their quarters;" and so particular were they to discover even the smallest portion, that they searched their houses with lighted candles. So too, do you take the candle of God's word, which you know is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart," and go down, as it were, into the very depths of self, and bring out all the leaven you can find there. And if the tree be good, the fruit will be good also; if the root be holy, so are the branches. The love of God in the heart will overflow in love to our neighbour also. It is the summary of Christian duty, that if we love God, we love our brother also. "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us."

SECTION LXVIII.

(Chapter xxii. verse 41 to the end.)

HITHERTO the questions in this chapter have all been on the part of others to Jesus; and we have seen the spirit in which, with one exception, they were proposed. We have now one from Jesus to them; and the feeling which is uppermost in one's mind on reading it is: Oh, the long-suffering, patience, and forbearance of God—the unwearied love that there was in the heart of Jesus towards those who were even then thirsting for His blood! These Pharisees had well-nigh filled up the measure of their iniquity; they had rejected every offer, and resisted every conviction; yet He would make one effort more. His heart still yearned over them; He would still gather them, if they would let Him, in safety under His wings, and hide them from the coming storm; and He therefore prepares the way by asking them what they thought of Christ: "What think you of *the* Christ—*the* Christ foretold by your own prophets and Psalmist—*the* Christ expected by yourselves—*the* Christ longed for and looked for by every Jew—whose son is He to be?" The answer was ready, "The son of David," according to the well-known prediction of the prophet: "There shall come a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots," and according to the universally received impression

of the whole Jewish nation. It was a natural step, therefore, in the argument, to ask how they applied the prediction of David, in the 110th Psalm, of the claims and character of the Messiah, in consistency and keeping with His character as David's son. It might lead them to the real, though mysterious solution of the difficulty; and if they could but once see the truth, how it was that David's son was David's Lord, the veil would have been taken from their eyes, and that glorious mystery of "God manifest in the flesh" would have been revealed to them; the stumbling-block of the poverty and the low estate of Jesus would have been removed; and they might even then have acknowledged that it was He that should come, and that they had no need to look for another.

It is worth while to stop one moment here, to remark once more* on the singular self-delusion and inconsistency of the present Jews, who still look for a Saviour to come,—who still believe, according to ancient prophecy, that when He does come, He must be of the house and lineage of David, and of the tribe of Judah; and yet, for more than 1700 years every trace of the lineage of David has been blotted out, and the very record of the tribe of Judah perished. The present race are called Jews, as if all of the tribe of Judah. Children of Abraham undoubtedly they are, but not a Jew of the present day can tell,

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with truth or certainty, of what tribe he is. The inference is plain: the Christ—*the* Christ promised of God and foretold by the prophets, must have already come; for if He be yet to come, it could never be proved by existing documents that He was of the stem of Jesse, or of the house and lineage of David.

It was easy for the Pharisees to reply to the question of Jesus, Whose son is Christ? "The son of David;"—the very children in their streets and temple had cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" The blind, in their calls for mercy, had said, "Thou Son of David!" It was, therefore, to lead them from the earthly parentage of "the Christ," to the heavenly one—to win from them, if it were possible, the acknowledgment that in some far higher and more mysterious sense than they had yet comprehended, the Messiah was indeed David's infinite superior, though He were yet a son—that He proceeded to ask them how it was that David, in that well-known 110th Psalm, speaking by the Holy Ghost, called the Messiah by the holy incommunicable name of Jehovah-God; and in what sense that high and awful name could be applied by David to one who was yet his son or descendant after the flesh. It is singular that the question here asked by Jesus never seemed to have entered the mind of those Pharisees; they had, no doubt, read the Psalm over and over again, and heard it read in their synagogues;

they never hesitated to acknowledge that it referred to the Messiah, His kingdom, His triumph, His priesthood; and yet it never once occurred to them to seek an explanation of its very first verse, where David, in spirit, called Him Lord. And yet, blessed be God, this question, which once silenced the proud and learned Pharisee, any well-instructed Sunday-school child could now without difficulty answer. I am afraid, however, that the same reproach may in a measure rest on us,—that we too often read the Word of God without personal application, or profitable inquiry. For instance, in reading this very passage of Scripture, have we ever asked ourselves, What think we? What do *I* think of Christ? It is a most important question. There are those who call themselves Christians, who would be as much perplexed to answer or explain how Jesus is both David's son and David's Lord, as ever Pharisee or scribe could be; and the veil is as impenetrably thick on a Socinian, as on any Jewish heart. And yet, without the blessed, glorious truth of Jesus, God and man in one Christ, deeply and indelibly, clearly and distinctly, engraven on my heart, I could not see my way one step. I could not surmount one trial, resist one temptation, encounter one sorrow in life, unless I felt in my inmost soul that I had a High Priest who could be touched with a sense of my infirmities. Far less could I enter, without shrinking, into the

fathomless depths of that dark and shadowy valley, unless I felt that I had the arm of God Himself to lean on, the rod and the staff of God's co-equal and co-eternal Son to comfort and uphold. What think *you*, then, of Christ? do you say, with Thomas, "My Lord, and my God"? Do you say, with Peter, "Thou art *the Christ*, the Son of the living God"? And should any one propose to enter on the barren wilderness of speculative doubt, or the more attractive field of rationalism, or Neologian innovation, are you prepared to answer, "Lord, to whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

SECTION LXIX.

(Chapter xxiii. verses 1—12.)

I AM not aware that, in the whole compass of the Bible, there is anything to be found at all to be compared with the strain of indignant denunciation throughout this chapter. There are, no doubt, passages in the prophets more sublime and grand, more poetically descriptive of the crimes and guilt of Israel and Judah, and more abounding in allegory and metaphor; but the very simplicity of the language in this chapter is its greatest severity: it seeks no ornament, but it admits of no compromise, and in the plainest and most unadorned strain, gives utterance to the sternest rebukes and the most

cutting denunciations that ever fell from inspired lips. At the same time, the close of this very chapter, in its sad, but touching lamentation over Jerusalem, shows that this language was the strange work of Jesus, and how gladly He turned from it to give vent to the sorrow of His heart over the doomed and guilty city. Let us remember, too, that these bold and uncompromising denunciations against the scribes and Pharisees were not uttered in secret, were not confined to His own disciples' ears, but were openly and avowedly addressed to a large Jewish audience,—to the very people whose every prejudice was in favour of a Pharisee, who had been taught to regard a Pharisee as the very summit of religious excellence, and who yielded the most implicit deference to all they said and taught. What a striking instance does it afford of that restraining power of God, which could thus still the madness, and curb the fury, of a Jewish multitude,—the fiercest and most infuriated of all people, when excited. When Jesus had but hinted, in the synagogue at Nazareth, of God's preference of a stranger and an alien over a Jew, His audience were so filled with fury, that they would have cast him headlong over the brow of the hill on which their city was built. When, again, at Jerusalem, He declared Himself the Son of God, and from everlasting, the Jews, in their indignation, took up stones to cast at Him; but here they listen, unmoved, to the boldest

invectives against their favourite and all but idolized teachers; they hear woe upon woe denounced upon them for their hypocrisy and tyranny; they see covering after covering stripped from them, till they are laid bare in their true colours, as "serpents, as a generation of vipers, ready for the damnation of hell;" and yet not a hand is uplifted, not a finger is stirred. Surely, it is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

It is remarkable, that though Jesus thus laid bare their hypocrisy, He acknowledges and sanctions their position as teachers. It is but an illustration of his own declaration just before: "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's;" and so these scribes and Pharisees "sit in Moses' seat," that is, they are the acknowledged expounders and appointed teachers of the Law; all, therefore, that they bid you observe and do in accordance with that Law, that do; all that they enjoin out of that Law, and arising from it, that obey. Their own guilty practices may degrade their own characters, and endanger their own souls, but it cannot diminish the authority of God's Word. A sign-post at the roadside may be a decayed and rotten one, and yet it points out the road unerringly to the inquiring traveller. And so, blessed be God, we may say, in the words of one of our Articles, that "the effect," or efficacy, "of Christ's ordinances is not taken away by the wickedness of those who minister."

God's Word, and God's precept, and God's promise, ever remains unchanged and unchangeable; "it shall not return unto Him void, but it shall accomplish that which He pleases, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto He sends it." And yet it is sad, when those who minister in holy things are themselves examples of unholiness; and though it will not excuse nor palliate the neglect of others, it is a sad hinderance to the truth, and causes many a weak brother to stumble and be offended. I think, however, that there is here a valuable lesson for us all; and that we may reflect profitably on the melancholy inconsistency that so often exists between profession and practice. "They say," but "they do not." It does not always require God's all-seeing eye to detect this; the world is keen-sighted enough to see, and malicious enough to expose, all such sad incongruities, nor do I know a more painful exhibition than a life, a temper, a practice, or a habit, at variance with our profession; and I am afraid I must add, I scarcely know one more frequent, and I fear that, at the present day especially, it is the great canker of vital godliness.

It is so easy to take up a name, and follow a party; it is so cheap to be fluent in advocating peculiar tenets, and so flattering to human pride and self-conceit to stand out prominently as the champion of what men call religious truth, but which truth itself calls party distinctions; it

requires so little self-denial, and fosters so much that is congenial to the carnal heart, that we meet with it at every turn, and in almost every shape. Men call, and perhaps think, themselves religious, because they *talk* about religion, and are more earnest to dispute than receive the truth. And if I were to lay my finger on what I conceive to be the great mar-plot of real holiness, humility, and Christian spirit and temper in the present day, it would be the disputatious character of our times, when hearers are more on the watch to detect party views, than to catch at gospel truth. "Party esteem," as an old writer expresses it, "is but withered fruit, and falls rather from Sodom's, than from Sion's trees." It leads, as our Lord so truly indicates, to that pride of heart, that conceit of manner, and that ostentation of practice, which is so at variance with the lowliness, humility, and self-abasement of a child of God.

SECTION LXX.

(Chapter xxiii. verse 13 to the end.)

Our Lord here proceeds to enumerate, under eight distinct and separate heads, or woes, the peculiar enormities or sins with which He charged these scribes and Pharisees: and a more fearful catalogue could hardly have been brought together. It may be,—for the words are the

same,—that, as when Jesus uttered the woes on the cities of Galilee, He intended to express commiseration and sorrow over their doom, rather than actually denounce the woe as inevitable, so there may be somewhat of a similar feeling in the present case; and certainly, there can be no doubt, from the pathetic apostrophe to Jerusalem, which closes the chapter, that there was sorrow, deep sorrow, in His heart. And is there no sorrow in His heart when He sees sinners filling up the measure of their iniquities, and knows the righteous doom of inevitable destruction which awaits them? He was to be a man of sorrow, of such sorrow as never lacerated human heart before. He is represented by the prophet, under the type of Jerusalem in her day of destruction, as calling upon the passers-by to see if there was any sorrow like unto His sorrow; and amid all the sorrow wherewith His Father had afflicted Him in the day of His fierce anger, I believe it was far from the least, that all He had done, and was yet to do for sinners, would, to the great majority in every age, prove utterly in vain. I believe, that even in that day of judgment, when He shall come in His glory to take vengeance on them that would not have Him to reign over them, there will be, even then, somewhat of sorrow in His heart, as He bids them depart from Him for ever; and that, as He wept over Jerusalem, because the things belonging to her peace were hidden from her

eyes for ever, so, as He pronounces the righteous doom and departure of the "cursed," He will mourn over the infatuated folly of those who would not come to Him that they might have life. And therefore, I will not deny that in thus denouncing these woes upon the scribes and Pharisees, there was sorrow in His heart at their obstinate rejection, even amid His righteous indignation at their hypocrisy, their covetousness, their extortion, and the many enormities of their conduct. But, oh! what must there be in sin, that can draw forth such fierce anger even from the tender heart of Jesus! With what almost of compunction and unwillingness does He speak of giving up sinners as hopeless! "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." And with what expostulation does He cry after them, even to the very last, "Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die?" I think we may get some glimpse of the meaning of that strong expression of Paul, how sinners "crucify the Son of God afresh;" how sin, though not literally the nail driven into His hands and feet, is, in very deed, the sword piercing His heart.

I must not go through the remainder of the chapter at any length, but I would just glance at any portions which may strike me as applicable or useful in the way of warning to ourselves.

Let us look for a moment at the first woe: it is for "shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men," or, as our Lord explains it, "neither going in themselves, nor suffering others who were entering to go in." We may think this strangely selfish conduct, and hope that it can have no reference to ourselves; and yet, alas! how common is the practice! how successful the effort! how fearful the sin! It would not be too much to say of every sinner, that as assuredly he is not himself on the way to heaven, so, by his example, his influence, and his practice, he is doing all he can to dissuade and prevent others from going on the road, and, alas! it may be, enticing and seducing some unhappy ones to follow him in his own path of sin and ruin. But let us take a more common illustration of the sin. What would you say of a master of a family, whose domestic arrangements were of such a nature on the Sabbath day as to preclude the possibility of his household, or any portion of it, keeping the day holy? Would he not, would not any one, be amenable to this woe, denounced by our Lord himself? I believe masters of families, and employers of others, are far more guilty of this sin of the Pharisees than they dare own to themselves. "Well, but this does not apply to us," some of you may say; "we are not employers of labour; we are not masters of families; are we not exempt from the woe?" I would indeed hope so; but just ask your-

selves the question, "Have I never proposed to a companion, or a friend, to occupy one portion of the Sabbath—the afternoon and the evening, for instance—in a ride, or a walk, in this engagement, or that amusement, when, but for me and my persuasions, he would have done otherwise? Have I never, by a jest, or by ridicule, or only a sneer at piety, sought to turn any one aside from following the Lord fully?" In fact, you see how almost endless it would be to go through all the variety of ways in which we may be guilty of this sin. And if there be an especial blessedness entailed on those who turn many to righteousness, there is a fearful woe denounced on those, who not only never themselves knock at heaven's door, but do all they can to prevent others from entering in. It was not very long ago that we heard Jesus declaring, "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones, which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." "Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"

SECTION LXXI.

(Chapter xxiv. verses 1—28.)

We have come now to the close of our Lord's public ministry on earth. His last address closes with that touching, tender appeal to Jerusalem,

calling even upon her, where His blood was so shortly to be shed, to ratify, as it were, the yearnings of His heart over her guilty children; and with this public testimony of His abhorrence of the sin, and His love for the sinner, He quits the temple, never to return to it again. Her day of grace was over; "the harvest was passed, the summer was ended, and Jerusalem was not saved." His disciples had heard His denunciations of the coming vengeance; but as they gazed on the magnificent structure they had just quitted, so adorned and decorated, so apparently firm and immoveable, with its stupendous, massive stones, they could hardly credit that such a building, dedicated, too, to the service and glory of God, should share in the general ruin; and, with natural pride, they point to the splendid pile, and demand their Master's admiration also. How singularly solemn, how strikingly awful, must such a doom of utter and irrevocable desolation have struck upon their ears, at such a moment of exultation, and coming, too, from Him whose last accents had been those of the intensest love and pity over Jerusalem herself! And yet, whatever obscurity there may be in the latter parts of this chapter, as to what events they especially refer, there can be none as to this prediction of the utter ruin of the temple. Improbable as such a prediction seemed at the time that Jesus uttered it, there was no obscurity in the declaration, that so utter should be its

destruction, that not one stone should be left upon another that should not be thrown down. And yet, had the disciples thought for one moment—had their memory glanced through the annals of their former history—they must have felt that it was far from "a thing incredible," that God should overthrow even the proudest and most magnificent of buildings, when the holy purposes for which it had been erected had been lost sight of and forgotten. Solomon had employed seven years in the erection of the first temple; he had expended incalculable treasures on its decorations and ornaments, and rendered it the wonder of the world; and when it was completed, and the ark of the Lord placed in the holy precincts, God himself condescended to bless the house with the symbol of His presence, —so glorious, that "the priests could not stand to minister, by reason of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God." And yet this temple, which the Lord had "hallowed for His name," scarcely lasted more than four hundred years. Of that, too, might it have been said, that when Judah had filled up the measure of her guilt, not one stone was left upon another. A little recollection, therefore, would have satisfied the disciples that their national sins had once brought desolation on a building more magnificent, and more endeared by the hallowed memorials within it, than that on which they were now gazing. This second temple was built

on the site of the first, on Mount Moriah, on the very spot of ground which David had purchased of Araunah the Jebusite, on which to erect an altar, and offer sacrifice, when the pestilence ravaged Jerusalem. Reared, however, amid so many dangers and difficulties, amid so much of poverty and persecution, it at first promised so little of outward splendour, that those "who had seen the first house, wept" at the melancholy contrast. And yet it was of this house that the prophet Haggai had declared that its glory should far exceed that of the former; and so it did, but not in the sense which these disciples imagined, when they pointed to its goodly buildings and stupendous stones. It was not its predicted glory, that Herod for nine years had employed nearly twenty thousand men in repairing and adorning it; it was not that, after Herod's death, the work still went on, till forty and six years had been spent in adding to its stability and grandeur: but its glory was at its height on that day when a poor and lowly mother brought into its sacred courts a babe, to present him to the Lord, and an aged man took that babe in his arms, and blessed God, and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." It was at its height when that babe, now grown to manhood, went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought, and said unto them, "My house shall be called a house of

prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves." It was at its height but the day before, when the crippled and the sightless thronged around Jesus in the temple, and He healed them, and the people and the children shouted, "Hosannah to the Son of David!" And yet it was of this temple, consecrated by His presence, and sanctified by His teaching, that Jesus now tells His admiring followers that not one stone should be left upon another. It is remarkable that not a word even of deprecation escapes them,—not even the "God forbid!" which the Pharisees had uttered when Jesus spoke of God's sending to destroy the husbandmen, and give the vineyard to others; they neither question the truth, nor deprecate the predicted wrath, but in silence accompanying their Master to the adjoining Mount of Olives, and there sitting at His feet, ask Him, not "How," nor "Why," but "When shall these things be?" Our Lord does not indeed satisfy their anxiety as to the exact time, but He gives them such unerring signs by which to judge of the coming vengeance, that when the storm did burst in its fury over the guilty city and the doomed temple, every Christian was enabled clearly to discern, and to escape the danger. It was David's warning, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way: if His wrath be kindled, (yea but a little,) blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." It was the Lord's own call by His prophet, "Come, my

people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." It is the tender assurance of Jesus himself: "For the elects' sakes, those days shall be shortened."

SECTION LXXII.

(Chapter xxiv. verse 29 to the end.)

THERE can be no doubt that the preceding portion of the chapter which we read last, relates entirely to the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem by the Roman armies; and though there may be images and passages equally applicable to any other period of "great tribulation," yet I think we shall be fully justified in confining it exclusively to that event. There is not similar certainty as to the remainder of the chapter. The questions proposed by the disciples to their Master I take to be simply two, though they are more generally considered as three. First: "When shall these things be?"—the things which their Lord had just uttered with regard to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Second: "What shall be the sign of Thy coming?"—Thy personal presence and appearance at or in the end of the world; combining both events under one head of inquiry, and not referring, as has been conjectured by many, to two separate and different periods

I cannot imagine that the disciples of Christ had at that period any distinct, perhaps we might say any notions at all, as to the millennial advent of our Lord. It had been indeed hinted at, though obscurely, by Daniel and other prophets, and the Rabbies taught something that implied they had a confused reception of the truth; but I cannot think that the disciples of Jesus, so dark on many points, so prejudiced on some, and so "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had written," had at that time any notions of that stupendous event, whatever it may be; and that they referred simply and solely to that coming of the Lord, at the consummation of all things, to judge the world, and which, in all probability, they connected in some way with the destruction of Jerusalem. The disciples, no doubt, had some indistinct ideas of "a kingdom to be restored to Israel," in which their Master should reign pre-eminent, and they too occupy posts of honour and distinction; but these ideas were evidently of far too worldly a nature to be at all connected with that most glorious millennial advent of Jesus. But though the disciples might not refer to this event, I think there can be little doubt that our Lord's answer does, though He so blends the two—both His millennial advent, and His final coming to judge the world—and intermixes allusions to each, and once or twice takes up again the first subject of the destruction of Jerusalem, that it is difficult to separate the respective portions. Nor indeed is it necessary, in

a family circle like our own, to give more than a passing glance to the tangled thread on which, no doubt intentionally, our Saviour strung the most important and valuable lessons.

The subject of the millennial advent of our Lord is one which is occupying a very influential position at the present moment. It is the event for which "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together;" it is the event for which the martyred ones beneath the altar are ever looking forward and crying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true?" It is the parting aspiration with which Scripture closes her sacred roll, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" Nor can it be denied that the fig-tree is putting forth its tender leaves; but though I would caution you against making this question a Shibboleth of party, as we are unhappily so apt to do with all religious questions, or of too curiously intruding into points which our Lord has purposely veiled in obscurity, I cannot too strongly inculcate and bid you hold fast the truth itself, with all its consolatory and instructive lessons. Our Lord has distinctly told us that the time "*when*," the day, and the hour, are known to no created being. It forms no subject of prophecy—it is not intrusted to angels to communicate: nay, more—it forms no part of the Saviour's commission on earth to reveal; but it is one of those secret things which belong to the Lord our God. Thus much we know: that it will be sudden, that it will be instantaneous, that it will be unexpected

by the great majority—and the first parable in the next chapter is intended to illustrate this very point;—so unexpected, indeed, that even the Church herself, waiting and longing as she has been, has at length fallen asleep. Neither is it expressly revealed, whether that millennial reign will be a personal reign on earth. I love to think that it will be so. I love to picture to myself "the tabernacle of God among men," when "He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God;" but it is not revealed distinctly: and if "my brother" think that it will not be so, he is my brother still, and our only strife shall be, which shall love Him most, and serve Him best; that, whether He reign on earth, or "the Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens," we may see Him in the heavens as He is, and behold that throne in glory.

SECTION LXXIII.

(Chapter xxv. verses 1—8.)

THIS parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, as I hinted before, is so evidently connected with the subject of the preceding chapter, that it may well be considered a continuation of the latter portion, which refers to our Lord's second advent. These ten virgins are evidently intended to represent the Church,—the professing body of

Christians; and this small number seems to intimate the comparative few who form that Church on earth; and even of them, the half are described as careless and indifferent, if not hypocritical professors. No doubt there are vast numbers who will be equally found at last to have no oil in their lamps, to have made no provision for eternity, and against whom the door will be as effectually closed as against the five foolish ones of this little band; but then, they have never professed to make preparation for their Lord's coming—they have lived and acted as if He were never to come. They may have occasionally and outwardly joined with the members of the Church, in various ordinances; but they have never had, never professed to have, never sought, nor wished to have, any part or lot in the matter. They have been dead branches on the tree, ready to be broken off at any moment, and visible to every passer by that they were both unsightly and dead. But it is not so with the virgins in this parable: they are represented, in the first verse, as equally providing themselves with lamps, wherewith to go out to meet the Bridegroom when He should come; and not only that, but actually setting out with the rest to meet Him. There was indeed a distinction, a most marked and fatal distinction, between them; but it was not visible to the human eye. They, no doubt, all wore the marriage garment, they were all engaged in the same work, and all, apparently, equally provided with the means of escorting

the Lord of the feast with honour to His home. Perhaps they did not even suspect their own deficiency: satisfied with present attainments, contented with the semblance of energy, zeal, and readiness, they did not open their lamps, to see in what state they were; they did not examine their hearts, to ascertain whether they were bright with love, and ready to kindle into flame at the first call of duty or emergency. And for a time all went well: there was a lengthened period of quiet waiting, calling for no peculiar active exertion,—a period of calm tranquillity, in which there was no sifting, no searching, into real character. The regular duties of life require, no doubt, much grace for their adequate fulfilment; but their more usual routine hardly discloses to a man's self what he really is, till the hour of difficulty, or decision, arises. During this period of peaceful, quiet waiting, this little band of virgins are alike represented as sleeping. Was this, however, a fitting posture for those who were waiting and looking for their Lord's coming? Assuredly, we may answer "No," if by sleeping, we mean being off our guard, falling asleep unprepared for the emergency that may arise, and when it does arise, unfitted to meet it. Such a slumber would be alike ruinous, and fatal to all who indulged it; nor could those who so yielded to its influence be, in any sense, called "wise." Nor do I by any means say, that these wise virgins were exhibiting that earnestness and

alacrity of heart which is implied in the word "waiting," such a waiting, as the Psalmist describes, exceeding that of those who wait for the morning, who are looking eagerly and intently to catch the first ray of the rising sun on the top of some distant mountain. They were probably infected by the example of the rest; and, alas! how truly does this show us, that the example of the careless and the irreligious is more effectual to ensnare the good, than the example of the good to reclaim the bad! And yet one would say of these, as one said of herself in olden time, "I sleep, but my heart waketh;" but, unlike her, when at midnight the cry was raised that the Bridegroom was at hand, did not put forward her vain and frivolous excuses to evade the duty, but sprang from their sleep with instant readiness, trimmed their lamps, renewed the oil, stirred up the flame, and with "their loins girded and their lights burning" went forth to meet Him. It was no false alarm: the Bridegroom was indeed come; the summons at the moment was unexpected, but not unprovided for, "and they that were ready went in with Him to the marriage. And the door was shut." As the Lord shut the patriarch into the ark, safe from the world of waters without, so the believer is safe in heaven from the world's sins and the world's sorrows; and the bridal song they sing is that song which Moses sang by the shores of the Red Sea: "Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth Thy people which Thou

hast redeemed; Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation;" and with this song is blended that still more glorious and precious new one of the Lamb, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and *we shall reign on the earth.*"

"Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."

SECTION LXXIV.

(Chapter xxv. verses 8—13.)

Our comments on this parable will be incomplete if we do not take in the unhappy case of the five foolish virgins. We have already just glanced at them, and I then remarked that they were rather self-deceivers than hypocrites. Self-deluders are a far more numerous class even than hypocrites, and the openly ungodly and profane: they are those whom the Apostle James designates "as hearers of the word, not doers, deceiving their own selves." Hypocrisy is a sin of far more odious and loathsome dye: the hypocrite means to deceive man, and hopes to deceive God; the self-deceiver intends to deceive no one, but ends in deceiving both the world and himself. Their end is, alas! the same. These are the outward decent, nay,

more, the apparently religious, the sincerely formal —those who confine religion to its mere surface, its external services and ordinances, or as the Apostle Paul describes it, "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." In a word we may say, as the wise virgins are representatives of the religion of Christ, of real vital godliness, so are the foolish of the religion of the world. Like Orpah and Ruth, the daughters-in-law of Naomi, they alike set out to accompany their mother to the land of Israel, both apparently equally sincere, equally affectionate, equally with their backs Moabwards, and their faces Zionwards: but here the resemblance ends; where the roads diverge, the one separated and went back, the other went onward. The wise and the foolish continue in each other's company, bent on the same work, looking for the same end, and giving no outward token that there was any difference between them. Admitted into fellowship with the church by the same symbol of grace, frequenting the same ordinances, kneeling around the same table, and partaking of the same elements, and alike looking for salvation through the same Saviour, there is no distinction perceptible to the eye of man. And so they both grow together till the harvest. The day, however, of separation comes, the hour of disclosure arrives, the veil is taken from their eyes, and at the moment of need they see their house swept along the wild waste of waters. They are like the fig-tree on which our

Lord came seeking fruit, but there was nothing but leaves—no inward work of grace, no renewal of the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost, no walk of faith, no "life hid with Christ in God," no meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light,—the affections as carnal, the heart as worldly, and as sluggish as they ever were. And, what is most painful and sad, the delusion continues to the very last; nor do they seem to have had even the most distant thought of their irrevocable doom, till the words, "I know you not," sounded in their ears. The same call that awoke the wise, awoke the foolish also; the same summons aroused both: "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him." They were perhaps alike blameable in the slumber that overtook them; yet the wise, ere they lay down to rest, trimmed their lamps, and provided that they should not be out of order when they awoke, in the same spirit of thoughtful, trustful reliance with which David acted: "I will lay me down in peace and take my rest, for it is Thou, Lord, only, that makest me to dwell in safety." It is evident that the foolish omitted to do this, for when they too awoke, their lamps had gone out, their store of oil was wasted, and at the moment of need there was neither readiness nor preparation to meet their Lord. It was perhaps but natural that, in their distress and perplexity, they should ask those at their side to help them; but, alas! what could they do? "If the righteous

scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Their own lamps needed all they had, how could they give of that which only sufficed for themselves? And, alas! I would say, what, at such an hour, "when men draw near to the gates of death," can the world do for them? what can friends, and weeping relatives, what can the minister of Christ, hastily summoned, and perhaps imperfectly understood,—what can all do? They can but do, as the wise virgins did, as Jesus Himself counselled, "buy of Him gold tried in the fire, and white raiment, that the shame of their nakedness do not appear." And yet the parable most fearfully warns us, that all counsel may be too late. Of the five foolish and unprepared ones, not one was admitted: the door was closed against them all; and the sentence of final and irrevocable exclusion extended to each and all. I would just say, before I close, that the Roman Catholics have been peculiarly unfortunate—I should say, infatuated—in their selection of texts of Scripture to uphold many of their false doctrines. As for instance, for the worship of saints, they quote John falling down at the feet of the angel, to worship him, but they omit that the angel "forbade him, seeing that he was his fellow-servant." And again, to authorize prayer to saints, they quote the rich man's prayer to Abraham to send Lazarus to his aid, but they forget to add the petition was ineffectual; and though Abraham is represented as hearing, he is

powerless to aid. And so here, to justify their sale of indulgences, they quote the passage in this parable, "Go to them that sell, and buy for yourselves," passing over the fact, that if these foolish ones did indeed buy of them who pretended to sell what should aid them at the moment of need, it was perfectly useless: the oil they bought had no power to relax bolt or hinge, and the door still remained closed. Nay more, to "go and buy" was worse than useless; for, had they gone at once, at the moment, just as they were—without oil, acknowledging their sin, and misery, and helplessness—who can say but, even at that midnight hour, the Bridegroom might have admitted them? And so, alas! it is with many among ourselves: they will seek for help from this source, they will first try this staff, and lean upon this reed, go here, and go there, try alms and penance instead of going at once and unreservedly to the all-sufficient, all-effectual righteousness of Christ. I may add, too, that the popish doctrine of works of supererogation receives but little countenance from this parable of our Lord's. "Give us of your oil," is the request; "Not so; *lest there be not enough for us and you*," is the answer.

SECTION LXXV.

(Chapter xxv. verses 14—23.)

THIS parable of the Talents was addressed to the disciples, and was intended to intimate to them the solemn responsibilities with which they would be intrusted on their Lord's departure from them. But we must not forget that our Lord on another occasion said, "And what I say unto you, I say unto all," and that the important lessons in this most instructive parable equally belong to us at the present day, as they did to those to whom it was first addressed. It takes in the whole human family: the three servants here selected are the representatives of every class, not so much as representing the amount of each one's talents and responsibilities, but as representing the use made by each, and the application and employment expected from all. We may notice, however, a discrepancy between the statements of the parable and what frequently occurs in real life. We do not always find it to be the case that those who receive most are the most faithful and diligent, nor that those who receive least are invariably the least thrifty and the most slothful: for the reverse is far oftener the case. We need only glance, not at the annals of a past age, but within the compass of our own experience, and we shall find many a melancholy

record of prostituted talents, abused powers, and wasted opportunities; while at the same time we may discern some lowly one, unrecognised by the world, living in the lowest obscurity, unheeded by all, save perhaps one or two, and with apparently the scantiest measure of talents, or opportunities, or means; yet, like the poor widow casting her two mites into God's treasury, making such use of the humblest means, that God's eye looks down in approval, and accepts the service with the gracious testimony, "She hath done what she could." It is not, however, to this point that the parable is at all intended to apply, but its lesson is, that God gives to every being whom he endows with reason, certain talents, and, be they few or many, He requires that they be used in His service, and for the purpose for which he bestowed them; that He has appointed a time in which He will reckon with His servants, and institute a strict and impartial scrutiny into their respective dealings, and, according as they can give up their accounts with joy, or are weighed in the balance and found wanting, He will apportion to each the righteous meed of His approval and reward, or the equally righteous doom of indignation and dismissal from His presence. This parable, then, applies to every living being except the idiot, who has never had reason, never had a glimpse of light to guide him: I was going to add, the maniac too, but he *may* have had years of reason, and therefore years of responsibility;

nay, his very present loss of reason may have resulted from the abuse of the talent, for which he is therefore, in all its aggregate, responsible. It applies to each one of us. We are represented and sketched out in the character of these three servants, who received at their Lord's hands the respective amounts of five, and two, and one talent to trade with. I do not speak now of the talents of birth, or fortune, or station: they are very fearful responsibilities, and though so often coveted, ought *not* to be subjects of regret or repining to those who possess them not, and *ought to be* especial subjects of prayer, for grace to use them aright, where they do exist. I would rather speak of the one talent, in which we are all alike equal, and for which we are alike responsible, from the Queen on her throne, to the prisoner in his dungeon; and that is, God has given to each an immortal soul, and, as far at least as we are concerned, He has given us abundant means of trading to advantage. It is not so with the majority of mankind: *they* are sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, but *we* are born in a Protestant land, in a land of Bibles, a land of churches, of schools, of means of grace on our right hand and on our left; it is with us line upon line, precept upon precept, not only Sabbath after Sabbath, but morning after morning, and night after night,—here a little, and there a little. And now, at this moment, should the cry be heard this very midnight, as it was by the

ten virgins, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go you—or you—or you out to meet Him," in what state would the Lord find your souls in His solemn time of scrutiny? In this portion of the parable, in the exact and rigid scrutiny which the Lord makes into His servants' accounts, we may indeed say, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" From him who has received the five talents, He requires an account of five; and from him who has received the two, He demands the account of two. The inquiry is strictly according to the talents intrusted, and no more. Of the master of a household, He will demand a master's talents, his opportunities, his influence, his example, his instruction, his vigilant and Christian superintendence of all: of a child, He will demand a child's talents; for be assured even the youngest, as soon as he begins to reason and to act, has begun, as it were, an account with God, and God will require a child's management even of a child's talent. And of a servant He will equally and as impartially demand a servant's improvement of his or her talents; and a servant in a Christian household has much for which to thank God, and give account to Him. The approval and the reward given to each is here expressed in the same words to both. In St. Luke's Gospel we shall find it apportioned according to their respective improvement. In neither case is "the reward reckoned of debt, but of grace;" and it may well

be that God, in his abundant mercy and sovereign grace, may assign to one a higher and a nearer station than another, for "one star differeth from another star in glory," and "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour;" but "the very least in the kingdom of heaven" is greater than earth's greatest.

SECTION LXXVI.

(Chapter xxv. verses 24—30.)

I DID not touch, when we last met, on the case of the unprofitable, slothful servant—his sin and his doom. Like the foolish virgins, he seems to be the representative of a very large class of persons even in the Christian world. I wish you to take notice, that neither in this, nor in the preceding—I might almost say, scarcely in any parable—does our Lord introduce the openly wicked, irreligious, and profane character. The five foolish virgins would have passed in the eyes of the world for religious characters, and the servant here is in no way represented as openly immoral, or profligate, or dishonest, but simply as "slothful." The five virgins paid attention to religious duties, and were, to a certain extent, zealous in the observance of what was decorous and seemly. This man *paid no attention* to such duties and observances: he was not in one sense irreligious, but in no sense

was he religious. He is upbraided by his Lord as "a slothful servant," and so to all intents and purposes he was as regarded his Master's service; but he may have been, and I dare say he was, a most active, stirring man of business, rising up early, and late taking rest, and eating the bread of carefulness to promote his own worldly views and aggrandizement. He may have been engaged in merchandise or traffic, and so absorbed in its complicated interests and perplexities that he had not time for other thoughts; and when the Sabbath, with its holy, calm, and quiet rest, invited him to leave other and perishing gains, and see what he had gained, and what more he could gain for his soul, he has hurriedly pushed it on one side, and said, "I have no time, now at least, for these things; when I have a more convenient season, I will attend to them." He has never lived to God, or walked with God, or thought of God; the talent committed to his keeping, the soul intrusted to his care, has been the last and the least cared for. The toils and turmoils of business have been the great end of his life. Or, he may have been a man of science, of splendid intellect, and of fame commensurate with his talents; and yet unsanctified talents, abilities, if not perverted, at least not employed to the glory of God, and without thought of Him who bestowed them, are as lost to the purpose for which God gave them, as if buried in the earth, or tied up in a napkin, and laid aside without use. So it

is in every station of life, in every class and rank of people. The mechanic and the labourer, the man seeking his daily bread by daily labour, may be equally burying his talent, may be equally careless and regardless of that immortal soul which has been committed to his keeping. And for a time all may go well: the world may honour and applaud: they may be excellent servants to the world, fill their posts in it worthily, and to the world's satisfaction, and they may even be held up for imitation. But the world is not their real master, after all. They owe a service to another; and there is a time coming when that Master will reckon with them. He did so with this man in the parable. He possibly may have thought that his Lord had forgotten him, as he had forgotten his Lord. He was absent in a distant country, and he had never seen Him. He had, indeed, sent servants and messengers to remind him of his duty, and to assure him of the certainty that He would come and reckon with him; but he had been too busy to hear their message, or attend to its import. It had escaped his recollection, amid the pressure of other thoughts; and thus year after year passes on without one thought of his soul, one inquiry, "What shall I do to be saved?" Gray hairs are here and there upon him, old age stealthily creeps on and on, and he is on the brink of the grave, while he is still saying to his soul, "Soul, take thine ease; thou hast much goods laid up for many years." "After a long time"—

so says the parable—"after a long time"—so long, that perhaps in his heart he may have said scoffingly, "Where is the promise of His coming?" —the Lord of that servant does come, and reckon with him. He may, perhaps, have thought, that his industry in the things of this world, his good name and reputation among men, may have entitled him to his Lord's acquittal, if not approval. At any rate, he evidently shows that he had not the remotest idea of the solemn purposes of a day of reckoning; that his own state as a sinner had never entered his mind; that he had no conception of a soul's worth, or of the price that had been paid for that soul. His reply is as ignorant as it is morose and rude. We are not, however, to suppose, that in the day of judgment there will be any such evasions and excuses bandied about between the sinner and his Judge. No! in that awful hour of dread, the scene in the marriage supper will be realized, and the sinner be speechless; or if a cry pass his lips, it will be to the hills and the rocks to fall on him and hide him from the wrath of Him that sitteth on the throne. Then, too, will be realized, in all its appalling verity, our Lord's own sentence, "From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." Every opportunity before vouchsafed, every means of grace, will be removed and taken away, every avenue of salvation closed, and closed for ever. The light amid which he lived, and which yet he disregarded, will be exchanged for outer dark-

ness; and within the drear abodes of hell, its bitterest curse perhaps will be, that every inmate there will have to own, that each one's doom is both righteous and just; and will find, to his unutterable horror, that "that sinner's darkness will be the greatest in hell whose light has been the clearest on earth."

SECTION LXXVII.

(Chapter xxv. verse 31 to the end.)

THE Bridegroom in the parable of the Ten Virgins, the Man travelling into a far country, and delivering his goods unto his servants, and the King in the present parable, are all one and the same person,—the Lord Jesus Christ; and the three parables seem to be descriptive of the same scene, but of that scene at different periods. In the first, the summons from this world is given: "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him;" and they that are ready go in with Him to the marriage, and the door is closed upon them; while the unprepared are refused admittance. In the parable of the Talents, we advance another step, and the reckoning is represented as taking place: the accounts are rendered up, the diligent and faithful are approved and applauded, the slothful and unprofitable rejected as worthless. And now, in this, the last of the series, our Lord removes for a brief moment the veil which

has been purposely cast over the day of judgment, and we are, as it were, pre-admitted to a glimpse of the Lord's dealings with His risen creatures before His throne. We have not only the final apportionment of each man's lot for eternity, but the very language in which, as well as the grounds on which, the sentence is pronounced.

St. John, in his Revelation in the Isle of Patmos, had a somewhat similar manifestation of the same scene presented to him; but, glorious and awful as his description is, it is one full of terror and dismay. The Judge that sits on the great white throne is one before whose face the earth and the heaven have fled away. The sea is described as having given up the dead which were in it, and death and hell the dead which were in them, and the surrendered dead, small and great, are standing before God; and the books, the solemn books of account, are opened, and the dead are judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works. Here every image is full of terror and awe; and though in the present parable the Son of man is represented as coming in His glory, with all His attendant hosts of holy angels with Him, and taking His seat on the throne of His glory; and though before Him are gathered all nations, from Adam and his first-born son down to his latest child, and that, too, for the purpose of their final separation, yet how soon are these images of glory, too dazzling for human eye, softened down into the tender

and familiar character in which Jesus loves to reveal Himself, "as a shepherd divideth his sheep;" and with what tenderness of love, with what almost emphasis of gratitude (if I may so speak), with what minuteness of detail does He here enumerate every deed of love, as if He would not suffer one to fall to the ground unremembered and unnoticed! What a beautiful and practical comment is this colloquy between the king and his people on that declaration of the Holy Spirit, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; for their works do follow them"! I would not, however, have you for a moment suppose that—either in this parable, or in the passage I have just quoted—to these works, however acceptable, and however accepted, through the intercession of the Redeemer, is ascribed any meritorious cause of salvation. "Their works *follow* them" into heaven; they are not described as going before to open for them the doors of the everlasting mansions. They are already blessed, they have died in the Lord, and their works follow to testify of the love that was in their hearts. And so here, they are already on the right hand of the Judge; the kingdom into which they are about to be admitted, is a kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world—before a single work had been done, before sin, and sorrow, and suffering had marred God's creation—from the free and sovereign grace alone of God in Christ; and though every act of love and charity is here ap-

provingly recorded, it is because they have sprung from a love of Him who died to save them, and because, though given to the poor and needy of their fellow-creatures, they have testified their obedience to the precept that "he who loveth God, love his brother also." Another remark also occurs to me from this passage. Here we have an assembled world: before the Judge are gathered all nations; conquerors, and scourges, and mighty men of old, men of renown, are mingled in the mass; he who sighed for other worlds to conquer; he who said, Is not this great Babylon that I have built? he, too, of our own time, who died upon his lonely rock, and he who struck him down. An account is taken of the transactions and events of every individual's life. And what does the description lay before us? Is it the world in its departed glory? Is it the world in its recorded sin? No; it is the world in its sorrows and sufferings. It tells us of hunger, and thirst, and nakedness, and sickness, and captivity. It speaks not of the monarch in his pomp, or the conqueror in his triumph, but of him who hath given the hungry to eat, and the thirsty to drink; who hath sat by the bedside of the sick, and visited the captive in his dungeon. It describes the world as it ever has been, and as it is at this moment; and I have no doubt that He who emphatically approved the widow's two mites, and accepted even the cup of cold water, and who has left on record this parable to encourage acts

of love to *His* brethren, and who seems to pass by, what the world loves to gaze on, will enumerate many a deed of love, forgotten by the doer, or if remembered, remembered only as worthless, as far too stained with weariness and erroneous motive, and who will hear their Saviour's commendation with the same surprise as these blessed ones did theirs. I doubt not that the records of the last day will bring to light many a Christian missionary's visit of love in some benighted court, or stifled garret, of the poor; many a stealthy footstep of some ministering sister to the bedside of the wretched and the outcast; and many a teacher's self-denying attendance at a Ragged School.

SECTION LXXVIII.

(Chapter xxvi. verses 1—13.)

We are now approaching very nearly the sad scene of our Lord's sufferings and death. In "two days," and far less than two days, Jesus would be delivered into the hands of His enemies, be condemned, and crucified, and slain.

It has ever been a subject of the deepest interest to know in what spirit men have met death. I will not say that it has always been a morbid anxiety to ascertain what have been the feelings, the conduct, and the language of men in the contemplation of approaching death, though that

anxiety has alike penetrated into the dungeon of the condemned criminal, or the dying chamber of the saint; for it is an event in which each living being must feel the intensest interest, inasmuch as each living being must himself die; and it is therefore but natural that he should seek to learn how others have felt and acted in such a trying moment. And yet I cannot but think that an undue stress has been laid upon dying moments. It may be that one too often sees the calmness of ignorance, or indifference, or hardness of heart, mistaken for the peace of God, which alone produces real calm at such an hour; it may be that so many a record of many a minister's life must testify to the falsity of the poet's line, that

"Men may live fools, but fools they cannot die:"

for we see men live like fools, and alas! too, die as fools; and one has so often had the painful duty to explain to those who were taking comfort from the calm departure of a friend or relative, that exhaustion was not peace, nor ignorance, assurance, that I confess I am not one to put much stress on dying testimony, unless there has been living testimony also. Then, indeed, such testimony is precious; it tells of God's undying love, His unwearied and everlasting arms beneath, His unfailing promise "never to forsake;" it tells that God's word is stronger than Satan's lie; and though he may be at such an hour permitted for a season to shake, yet many a

dying pillow witnesses and sets its seal to that truth, that "no one shall pluck a child of God out of His hand." I doubt not that at such seasons the Lord does vouchsafe, in many and many an instance, especial consolations and supports. I believe that not unfrequently the veil that shrouds eternity from view, is at the last removed, and the eye, dimmed and closed to earthly objects, is catching the first glimpse of its heavenly home, and that home's blessed inmates; and the dulled ear is hearing those "unspeakable words," which earthly tongue must not utter. God forbid, therefore, that I should deny or disbelieve that some of the most cherished and sacred memorials bequeathed to, and treasured in the hearts of, survivors, as well as legacies to the church at large, are the dying testimonies and experiences of departing friends and relatives; and from many a sorrow-stricken heart, in that moment of bereavement, yet of grateful praise, has broken forth the exclamation, "Oh! that I may die the death of the righteous, and that my last end may be like his!" But while I gratefully and gladly testify to this, I would not have survivors too much on the watch for such expressions, nor anxious and unhappy if they are not given. There may be, and there must be, many hinderances. Moments of bodily agony, of wandering reason, or dying weakness, are not moments of triumph; and if the life of the departed one has been a "life of faith," and "a walk of faith," his end will also

be "the triumph of faith," even though he may give no utterance to his hope, no oral testimony that God is with him in his last hour.

I have been led into these reflections, because the dying hours of Jesus have all the interest which can awaken the intensest sympathy and the deepest awe. In His greatest humiliation, He is invested with a dignity that awes His judge, when mocked by Herod and his men of war, and the Roman soldiery. There is grandeur in His very silence, and in His extremest sufferings He even forgets Himself to think on others. He was fully aware, even to the minutest act of scorn, of everything that was to befall Him, yet He shrinks not from it; nay, He goes to Jerusalem for the express purpose to meet His end—for it could not be that a prophet should perish out of Jerusalem—and to fulfil the prophecy, which declared He should enter the city as her king. He calmly states the day and the hour of His condemnation, though not a hand was yet raised against Him, yet omits not an opportunity to testify the truth, even though that truth whetted their rage tenfold against Him. And when the affectionate sister of Martha and of Lazarus, in the house at Bethany, poured the box of ointment on His head, and was rebuked by the less zealous guests around, His defence of her was, that she had done it for His burial. His death, His burial, was in His thoughts, even as He sat at meat; and He accepted her costly offering, not so much in honour of His

person, as in memorial of a love that would embalm even His lifeless corse; and He then uttered that prediction, which, whosoever readeth it, and wheresoever read, he may close the book, as Jesus closed the roll in the synagogue at Nazareth, and say, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." When Jesus declared that "wheresoever this gospel should be preached, there also what this woman had done should be told for a memorial of her," not a Gospel was written, and not one dreamed of a written Gospel; yet within a very few years one of that very company recorded that deed of love, and we, at this distant day, have read it, and have thus both alike fulfilled the declaration of Jesus.

SECTION LXXIX.

(Chapter xxvi. verses 14—25.)

At a far earlier period of His ministry, Jesus had said to His disciples, "Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" and it is added, "He spake of Judas Iscariot." Even then the heart of Judas was as fully revealed to his Master, as it was afterwards to himself, his fellow-disciples, and the world. Jesus, from the very beginning, read in that heart its covetousness and its perfidy. There was no outward sign to give token of the deep guilt within. Judas companied with the rest of the apostles,

nay, he was called to be an apostle by his Lord: he had the commission of an apostle, and was sent forth equally endued as the rest with miraculous gifts and powers. He had heard the teaching of Jesus both in public and private, he had no doubt knelt with Jesus in prayer, and yet he is a lost one! From the very first he is called a devil, a son of perdition, and here we have Jesus declaring, in the most awful and emphatic terms, "Woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born." From the very first there had been no root of the matter in him: his sin was covetousness; he had no doubt followed Jesus with worldly views and worldly hopes, and now that his Master had begun to talk so openly and undisguisedly of his approaching death, and had even described it as within almost a few hours of its consummation, his hopes begin to fail, and his fidelity to waver; a suspicion enters his mind that he has followed a Master whose service will be no gain. The rebuke, too, which Jesus gave him for his murmuring over Mary's waste of the ointment rankled in his heart; and, as usual, one was close at hand to suggest harder and darker thoughts of God, and deeper schemes of guilt. It is said in another gospel, "The devil entered into him," and finding the heart ready for his reception, as it were "swept and garnished" for him, he hurries him onward to his fatal offer to the

chief priest. Alas! what are gifts, and privileges, and outward ordinances, to one whose heart is still unsanctified. What are all the advantages of religious communion, religious associations, and fellowship even with holy men, if there be still a root of bitterness within, unchecked in its growth by the grace of God, and fostered by an evil covetousness and heart of unbelief! What a warning is it to ourselves not to rest in external membership alone! None could be closer than this unhappy "son of perdition," called indeed of his Lord, but not chosen; sharing in every privilege and gift with his brethren, himself a preacher to others, and yet at last "a castaway."

I know that a question here arises of solemn but mysterious import, Why was Judas chosen and yet rejected? Why was Judas given to be a disciple, an apostle, an associate and companion of apostles, an eye-witness and a personal hearer of the Saviour, a preacher of righteousness, and a worker of miracles, and yet left finally to perish? We might equally ask, Why is any sinner born into the world? Of every sinner that perishes in his sin, we might as truly utter our Saviour's mournful doom, "Woe unto that man! it had been good for that man if he had never been born." The only answer that meets the question is the Saviour's own answer, "Many are called, but few are chosen:" and yet the painful exclusion here was not of the many, but only of the one. Twelve

were called, eleven chosen, and one alone rejected, and that in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "His bishoprick let another take." More than a thousand years before the coming of Jesus, had the treachery of Judas been foretold. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning;" and though there are depths we cannot, and we dare not fathom, yet there is a resting-place for every doubt, an answer to every difficulty in the eternal and illimitable sovereignty of the Most High. "He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth. And who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?" Of this, at least, I have not the remotest doubt, that had even Judas, when the awful suggestion was first darted by the Tempter into his mind—had he, even then, thrown himself at the feet of Jesus, and cried, as Peter cried before him, "Lord, save me, I perish," Jesus would have put forth His hand even to that son of perdition, and plucked him as a brand out of the burning: had he, even at a later moment, gone out and wept bitterly, with such tears as Peter wept from his broken and contrite heart, he too would have been forgiven, he would not have been cast out. But there was no feeling of the kind, no relenting in his purpose, no misgiving in his treachery; but alas, for him! as he closed his bargain with the priests, he closed another with Satan also, and for the thirty pieces of silver gave up his own lost and ruined soul.

SECTION LXXX.

(Chapter xxvi. verses 26—35.)

It is in these verses that we have recorded the institution of the Lord's Supper. And, perhaps, the very first remark that would occur to any one's mind on reading it, is its extreme simplicity, the almost brevity, and the absence of all ostentation, in the account here given us in this Gospel of St. Matthew. You must remember that it is not a passing incident that occurred on that melancholy evening, the last which Jesus passed in intimate and affectionate intercourse with His disciples; it is not a transaction which derives its sole or chief interest from the circumstances under which it took place; it is not a mere act of touching condescension on their Master's part towards His sorrowing followers, which they might love to record in the narrative of His life, and on which they themselves would dwell with all the affectionate tenacity of memory, as long as life lasted, and that, beyond those who sat at that table on that night of sorrow, it possessed no other interest than what would attach to any other incident in the life of Jesus. The narrative in these four short verses possesses an interest far beyond that which any transient incidental circumstances could give: it records an institution in which every Christian's heart was to feel an interest till the end of time; it tells of a holy, simple rite,

which was to be the badge of Christ's disciples, through every age of the Church, in every Christian clime; it describes an ordinance which was to cheer so many successive pilgrims on their journey through the desert, which has strengthened them by the way, and has shed its own heavenly light in so many a sick chamber, and over so many a bed of the dying. We can imagine the feelings that, in such sad and quick succession, must have passed through the minds of these disciples, as the sorrowful events of that night occurred. They are not, indeed, recorded by St. Matthew, nor is it necessary to gather them together now from the other Evangelists; but after they had partaken of the passover together, Jesus proceeded to take of the bread which was on the table, and, blessing and breaking it, He handed it to the disciples with the simple announcement, "Take, eat; this is my body." The passover had been eaten for the last time; the lamb, through so many ages the type of Him that was to be the true victim, had been slain. Henceforth, when the Lamb of God should have shed that blood which taketh away the sins of the world, the sacrifice was completed. No more victims should die, no more lambs be slain, to typify an oblation already offered, a sacrifice already full, perfect, and sufficient for the sins of the whole world; and henceforth, bread, the now peaceful produce of man's industry, but which once came down from heaven to feed and sustain the hungering ones in

the wilderness—bread was to be the emblem, the memorial, of the Saviour's love. No more of death's convulsive throbs, no more dying agonies, to represent a sacrifice *to be made;* but bread, by which man liveth, to represent a sacrifice *already made.* And so with the wine; no more of blood, to gush from the wounded and pierced lamb, to represent the Saviour's blood *that was to flow;* but wine, that cheereth the heart of man, to represent the blood that has been already poured out. By the law, indeed, came death—by the Gospel, life; and how appropriate and striking the emblems of each!

It is now more than eighteen hundred years since, in that upper room at Jerusalem, Jesus reclined with His disciples around that Paschal and Sacramental table. It was but a few hours before His crucifixion, and He was desirous to bequeath to His Church on earth a solemn but simple rite, which should not only be a memorial of *His* dying love, but a pledge of *our* union with Him, and an avowal to the world that we are, in deed and truth, followers of a crucified Lord and Master. From that hour it has been provision by the way—in every age of the Church, there has been no interval in which it has not existed. Its simplicity, indeed, has been marred and cumbered, its purposes have been frustrated, its precept disregarded, its command disobeyed, and its very language perverted.; but even in darkness has light shone, the Lord has never left Himself

without witnesses to testify of His love, and of the abundant provision He has stored up for them. His invitation still runs, as it did to His Church of old, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved."

SECTION LXXXI.

(Chapter xxvi. verses 36—46.)

It is with most unfeigned awe that I now approach this scene of agony, in the Garden of Gethsemane. There is something solemn in the communings even of a creature with his Creator, so solemn, that few would presume, with unhallowed hand, to lift the veil that shrouds the interview from human gaze. Even with our own kindred feelings, as fellow-creatures and fellow-sinners, we could hardly comprehend the complicated emotions that would possess and gush from another's heart, in his moments of unrestricted and unrestrained communion with his God. Can we then enter into, can we understand, all the mysteries of this hour of earnest pleading between the smitten Saviour and the smiting Father! And yet the narrative before us is singularly minute; every word, at least in the original, and even in our version, seems to deepen in anguish as it proceeds; and one is lost in awe, why the Father should thus sorely afflict His well-beloved, why He should not withdraw that cup of bitter-

ness at His Son's earnest pleading for its removal, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me?" Was there unkindness in the Father's heart? were there no relentings, no yearnings in Him, who had declared His love to be beyond any earthly mother's love? I believe we should never read this portion of Scripture, without reading also, as its most fitting comment, the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. There we learn *why* He was thus smitten of God and afflicted, why He was thus exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Oh! what a little word is sin! but what infinite consequences does it bring with it! It was a sad scene in the Garden of Eden, when sin first entered into the world; not even then, amid all the harrowing sorrows of their expulsion from Paradise, could the guilty pair comprehend what sin was, in all its loathsomeness and deformity before God. They knew themselves naked, and were ashamed—they heard God's voice, and were afraid. It was a far deeper glimpse of sin they caught on the day when their first-born, Cain, lifted up his hand against his brother Abel, and smote him to the earth. Adam's posterity knew something of what sin was, or, at least, of what sin merited at the hand of God, when all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened, and the waters destroyed the whole earth. It was an awful development of the Lord's hatred of sin, when, in a later age, the storm of fire fell

on the guilty cities of the plain, and swept them from the earth. And many and many a time has the Lord made bare His arm to show His righteous indignation against sin. But never was that hatred made so clear, never did God so display the ineffable purity and holiness of His nature, and His utter and intense abhorrence of sin, as in this scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, when, in the language of prophecy, the Lord bade "His sword awake against his shepherd, and against the man that is His fellow, when the Shepherd should be smitten, and the sheep scattered, and His hand should be even upon the little ones." It was not bodily pain which drew forth this cry of agony—for Jesus suffered none at that moment; it was not the sight and sense of His own deep guiltiness before God, and which is the heaviest burden of *our* cross—for Jesus was without sin, holy, harmless, undefiled; but it was *our sin*, which was the bitterest ingredient in His cup of sorrow—it was *our sin*, that bathed His brow in that bloody sweat, which gushed from every pore—it was our sin that caused Him to fall prostrate on His face on the cold earth, and pray, if it were possible, for the removal of His Father's anger. He was our surety; "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, and the Lord laid on Him the iniquities of us all." As our surety, in His human nature, He was to tread the wine-press of God's wrath alone; there was none to help, none to

uphold. The Father for a season had forsaken, the Holy Spirit had withdrawn: and that Tempter, who had been foiled in the wilderness, now returns with redoubled fury, to try and wring from the tortured and afflicted soul of Jesus, a surrender of all His purposes of love and mercy to man.

Do we then want to know what is in sin? Go to Gethsemane, it teaches even more than Calvary. Many a martyred one has suffered, for Jesus' sake, what He suffered on Calvary; many a tortured one has endured bodily sufferings as severe, and perhaps severer, even than when His frame was racked upon the cross; but never from that hour when God created man,—never through all the complicated agonies which man has inflicted on his fellow-man, or all the tortures of a broken and a wounded heart,—has there been sorrow like unto the sorrow of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

SECTION LXXXII.

(Chapter xxvi. verses 47—56.)

I DO not know any portion of Scripture that, when truthfully applied by the Spirit, can wring from us such a conviction of our own utter weakness and insufficiency to stand in the hour of trial or temptation, or one that should so powerfully suggest the Apostle's caution, that even when, and perhaps the more when, we think we

stand firm, we should take heed lest we fall. I have read somewhere of that blessed martyr, John Bradford, that, whenever he saw a criminal led to punishment or execution, he would exclaim, "Ah! there goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God." And melancholy as the picture is which is here presented to us of man's depravity, in almost every shape in which it could be exhibited, one should tremble to think that we too are of the same flesh and blood,—that if there was hypocrisy and treachery in Judas in its worst form, there is the germ of the same sin in our own hearts—if there was malice and hatred in the high priest, and those who sat in judgment with him, the carnal mind in all is still enmity against God—if there was cowardice and desertion on the part of the disciples in the moment of danger, there would be even at this day the same disinclination and turning aside from peril and persecution, and somewhat, perhaps, of the answer of one who said, "I know it is the truth, but I cannot burn for it." It was not without especial reason that our Lord left us, as a daily, almost hourly prayer, that most necessary petition, "Lead us not into temptation:" for without the upholding, restraining, and preventing grace of God continuously with us, I believe that no man living could stand—that the very moment God's hand has loosened its hold of ours, or that we have let go our hold of God, that moment is the moment, not of our liability to, but of our actual fall into sin.

Let us look for a moment at the sin first presented to our notice,—that of the traitor Judas. I have already commented on his guilt as "the son of perdition," his predicted treachery,—predicted by the Psalmist, foretold and foreseen by Jesus Himself; and yet—nay, for that very cause—permitted of God to be completed, that "the Scriptures might be fulfilled." We have now the consummation of his crime, with the sad addition of the hypocrisy which pretended to love and reverence, even while treachery was in his heart. The baseness of Judas, from first to last, is of the lowest and most degraded kind; one recoils with horror at the thought of that last act of kissing the Master he was betraying to death, and giving Him the salutation of peace, while the next moment was to deliver Him into the hands of His enemies. Alas! had not the narrative told us otherwise, one might, in that charity which "hopeth all things"—one might have hoped that the act was an involuntary one; that though he had indeed tracked His Master's steps, and followed Him into privacy, with the base purpose of his heart; yet, that when he saw that heavenly countenance, on which he must have so often gazed with reverential wonder, now furrowed with the deep lineaments of that agony which had so rent his inmost soul—when he beheld that brow still bedewed with the sweat which had fallen like drops of blood from Him—one might, I say, have hoped that some strong

impulse of remorse overcame him ; that, impelled by more than human feeling, he had hastened to his Master with all the awakened gushings of a new nature, and the revival of that affection, which once, no doubt, he had expressed, and perhaps in part felt, for Jesus, and conscious of, and deeply repentant of, the guilt that had been in his heart, had, with irrepressible sorrow and remorse, thrown himself on his Master's neck and kissed Him, in accordance with the Scripture precept, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry;" and that we should have heard from his lips the faltering confession, "I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee." But, alas! it was no such feeling, it was no such gushing forth of an awakened sinner's conscience. That kiss was the premeditated, devised, concerted signal of his treachery, and accompanied by an addition that too plainly showed that, *as yet*, no remorse, no misgiving, no scruple, had arisen in his covetous heart: "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He: *hold Him fast.*" And have we never been tempted to betray the Saviour with a kiss? have we never had love on our lips, and obedience in our manner, and rebellion in our heart? Many were the wounds of Jesus; and if one were to say unto Him, "What are these wounds in thine hands?" He would tell us, that the keenest of all were those with which He was wounded in the house of His friends.

SECTION LXXXIII.

(Chapter xxvi. verse 57 to the end.)

At our last meeting, we considered the sin of Judas in betraying his Master with a kiss: but was his the only case of desertion on this night of sorrow? It has been often said that Jesus had but twelve friends, and of these, one betrayed, another denied, and all forsook Him and fled; and this is, indeed, true as to the literal fact: for Judas did betray, Peter did deny, and all forsook Him in His hour of danger. But we must remember, that even of these very followers our Lord Himself said, "Those that Thou gavest Me, I have kept, and none of them is lost save one." Nor should we forget, that though the twelve forsook Him for a season, and left Him exposed to all the malice of His foes, without any apparent effort to aid or to console, yet, even humanly speaking, He was "not alone." There was many a sympathizing heart, and many a tearful eye, amid the crowds that followed Him on His road to Calvary; and of these very twelve, one fond and faithful one at least was by His cross, and within reach of his Master's voice.

I do not deny their sin—I would not palliate their cowardice, nor lessen the unkindness of their desertion. It is, indeed, a melancholy proof of the infirmity of our nature, and how little capable it is, under emergency of peril or of terror,

to sustain any extent of consistency, of courage, of gratitude, or love, or friendship: that every tie is insufficient of itself, and snaps at the first strain of difficulty or danger. But the point to which I would now chiefly advert, is the love and tenderness of Jesus, even in the midst of their unkindness to Him; and how, even when Himself delivered up to the malice of His enemies, and apparently the most forsaken and defenceless of all, His arm was still mighty to save—how, even in that hour of scattered flight, He still, as it were, gathered them under His wings, and they were safe. They were, indeed, permitted to fall into this grievous sin; but He had said to the Tempter, "Thus far shalt thou go; but no farther." Satan had succeeded so fatally with Judas—he had so far gained his end with the rest, as to cause them to shrink in dismay from their Master's side; he had so successfully played upon the fears of one, as to put a lie into his mouth, and lead him to deny his Master, and to answer to each succeeding interrogatory, "I know not the man," that he might well hope he had gained all as his prey. And yet, at that very moment of his imagined triumph, there was One stronger than he to bind and despoil him. And who was that One? It was He who was Himself a prisoner, who was surrounded and dragged captive by a band of armed men, and led away to torture and death, whose very weakness was stronger than Satan's might. "Can any pluck them out of my hand?"

We know that he had prayed for Peter, that Satan might not prevail against him, that—however much he might desire to have him, that he might sift and crush him, as he had done the traitor—he might not be given over into the hands of the cruel enemy and oppressor. And as He prayed for Peter, so had He prayed for the rest. And oh! in what touching words, in what fervency of spirit, with what mighty and prevailing pleas, with what holy intercession, let the 17th chapter of St. John's Gospel tell! He had prayed—and no doubt with this scene, among many others, full in His mind—not that they should be taken out of the world, but that they should be kept from the evil. And they were kept; they were not, indeed, taken away from the scene of danger and trial; they even shrunk for a season before the fury of the storm: but they were kept from the power, and malice, and triumph, of the Evil One: and, of those whom God had given to Jesus, not one was lost, save the son of perdition.

Oh, what it is to have an interest in Jesus—an interest in His love, in His prayers, His intercession, His blood, His salvation—to be one of His! Peter, in his ignorance and terror, shrank from the charge, "Thou art also one of them." But, oh, what a blessed assurance, if the Spirit bear witness with our spirit that we are His! Happy, thrice happy, for us to be even among the despised and scorned ones of Jesus, yet still one of the owned and acknowledged ones of Jesus.

SECTION LXXXIV.

(Chapter xxvii. verses 1—11.)

We have already commented on the guilt of Judas; we have here his miserable end. It is seldom that retribution follows so closely on the track of crime. The ancient heathen represented punishment as limping with lame and crippled foot; and, in many an instance of God's dealings with sinners, we must acknowledge that "sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily." It is not so here; not twelve hours before, we saw Judas, at the head of a band of armed men, entering the garden of Gethsemane, the successful and rewarded traitor. The morning had scarcely dawned upon that night of treachery, when the same Judas bursts in upon the assembled council, and, with horror-stricken remorse and agony, declares that "he had sinned in betraying the innocent blood." We may, indeed, say, in the prophetic words of the Psalmist, "Death came hastily upon him, and he went down quick into hell."

It is very probable that Judas never contemplated any such results as the condemnation of his Master from his betrayal of Him. He no doubt thought of the scene at Nazareth, when the people would have thrust Him over the brow of the hill on which their city was built, had not Jesus miraculously restrained their violence; and

how again at Jerusalem, under similar circumstances, Jesus had hidden Himself from the fury of His enemies, when they would have stoned Him; and it is therefore probable that he may have expected a similar display of power on the present occasion. But what then? does this lessen the guilt of the traitor, because he thought his victim might break loose from the meshes of the snare he had laid for Him? Is it a mitigation of the sin, that it entails not all the injury, and effects not all the crime, it contemplated? and, can it be a lessening of its enormity that it produces more than was intended? The man who lets loose a reservoir of water may not contemplate the havoc it is but too likely to cause; but, having once set the waters in motion, he is, to all intents and purposes, responsible for every iota of mischief that ensues; and Judas soon found that successful guilt is a more rapid forerunner of misery than disappointment and failure. Whether Judas was present at the scene in the high priest's palace, and saw the cruel indignities which were heaped on Jesus there, we cannot say; nor is there any intimation given that Judas was expected to do more than simply deliver Jesus into their hands; and yet it seems singular that, having bought the traitor's services for one purpose, they did not bargain for his evidence also, when they so much needed it. But this was no doubt overruled of God, and the very silence of the traitor, in the first instance,

and the confession wrung from his tortured heart afterwards, "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood," was but a declaration of the same truth, which his judge so shortly after uttered, "I am innocent of the blood of this just man," "I find no fault in Him."

I have spoken of the speedy retribution which overtook the traitor. It is seldom that Satan gives his victims so short a tenure as he did to Judas; but it is quite true with all, that as soon as they have done his work, as soon as they have accomplished all he can get out of them, he will cast them off as worn-out and worthless tools; and in every case, be the service long or short, Satan's wages are always death. He has, indeed, no other to give, though he is fluent enough in his promises. When he "entered into Judas," he must have promised far more than the paltry pittance for which he sold his Master; but, once committed to the sin, once within the Tempter's grasp, he had no power to break his fetters, and what is called the suggestion of despair was no doubt the suggestion of Satan also, to drive him to suicide.

But do we not learn, if possible, a still more awful lesson from the conduct of the chief priests and elders—those agents and human instruments of the devil in the ruin of this miserable wretch's soul? He had done their work as well as Satan's, and when that was done they threw him aside with as much indifference as they would a soiled

rag. What were all the agonies of his remorse to them? Did he expect sympathy or compassion from them for himself, or deliverance for the Master he had betrayed to them? Alas, for the miserable sinner's hopes! I believe it to be an unerring and righteous truth in God's dealings with the guilty, that, in every instance, the successful tempter and seducer of another into sin, when his purposes are gained or satiated, is the most heartless and unfeeling, the most cruel and relentless mocker and despiser of his victim's agonies and sorrows. Judas is not the only one whom sin, and remorse for sin, has driven to suicide; Judas is not the only one, who, when they have cast the blistering wages of their infamy and ruin at their seducer's feet, have been met with the callous scoff of these chief priests and elders, "What is that to us? see thou to that."

SECTION LXXXV.

(Chapter xxvii. verses 12—27.)

A COURT of justice, where a human being is on his trial for life or death—for acquittal or condemnation—is at all times a solemn place; and many an earthly tribunal has been rendered peculiarly solemn by the circumstances which have given interest to the prisoner, or awfulness to the charge against him. As the morning dawned upon the night which witnessed the

seizure of Jesus, at its earliest hour, an almost unprecedented scene must have met the eyes of those who were stirring in the streets of Jerusalem. A poor solitary prisoner, who had been kept all night in the high priest's palace, exposed to the mockery of a pretended trial, and then left unprotected to the jeers, and insults, and indignities of the menials of that palace, is seen hurried along in bonds to the judgment-seat of the Roman governor. And what is the crime with which He is charged? what is the offence which so infuriates His enemies to pursue Him with such deadly rancour? The charge is, that He aimed to be King of the Jews, the rival of the Roman emperor! Pilate must have seen and felt the almost absurdity of the charge. This poor, unpretending prisoner, without friend or follower, without partisan or associate, apparently of the humblest birth, and of the lowest poverty, of whom, if Pilate had heard at all, he could have heard only, that he went about doing good, but had not where to lay His head—is this the claimant of Rome's imperial throne? Is this He who forbids to give tribute to Cæsar, and demands for Himself the ensigns of Cæsar's sovereignty? It is in derision and contempt of such a charge, that Pilate asks, "Art *Thou* the King of the Jews?" And yet there was that ineffable grandeur, that calm and quiet dignity, in the manner of Jesus, that the judge, unconsciously to himself, became more than interested in the prisoner that stood

before him. There was indeed no other charge alleged against Him. It was this which the Roman soldiery made the subject of their guard-house jest, when they threw on Him one of their scarlet cloaks, plaited a crown of thorns for His head, and put a reed, the mock ensign of a sceptre, into His hand, and bade Him "Hail" as a king. It was this, and no other charge, which was affixed to His cross; and herein were verified and overruled, for the manifestation of God's truth, two most opposite, and apparently contradictory predictions, that Jesus should suffer as a transgressor, and yet be avowed as a king, even by those who would not have this man to rule over them.

Just let us, for one moment, imagine ourselves spectators in that court of justice on that eventful morning. We might look with awe on the judge, who sat there with the power to crucify or to release; we might cast a casual glance of pity on the prisoner, and wonder why His accusers stood there with such fury in their looks, and malice in their hearts, to oppress one so helpless and unresisting; but we should probably see little more than many a scene in any ordinary court of justice would have presented. And yet, could the veil have been withdrawn, which shrouded the invisible spectators of the scene, what should we not have beheld? that mystery which the angels desired to look into, deepening in intensity, and gloom, and horror! But let us now cast our

eyes onwards to another tribunal, where the same parties are present—where Pilate is once more confronting Jesus—and those very chief priests and elders that clamoured so loudly in the judgment-hall of Jerusalem, are again in the presence of Him whose blood they then demanded at the hands of the unrighteous judge: but, oh, how changed is all! The judge is now the trembling criminal, the once-clamouring and blood-thirsty priests are trembling at his side; and the lowly, despised Jesus, is seated on the throne of His glory, with all His holy angels around and about Him, "for this King must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet." "Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him." And as to "those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before mine eyes."

And are not we concerned in this scene? have we no interest in it? Are Pilate, and the chief priests and elders, the only ones that shall stand before that throne? "We must *all* stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." Are we then among His friends that shall be owned; or His enemies that shall be slain? The test is the same to us; Is He our King, and does He reign over us? or is our avowal of His sovereignty like that of Pilate, in mockery; like that of the Jews, in scorn; or like the Roman soldiery, in indifference and jest? Is there no rebel temper, no dis-

obedient passion, no refractory habit or practice? Jesus, though a king, yet bore His cross. Are we ready and willing to take up our cross daily and follow Him? If so, if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him.

SECTION LXXXVI.

(Chapter xxvii. verses 27—45.)

WHEN Jesus made His entry into Jerusalem in that semblance of triumph, amid the acclamations and hosannas of the people, it was to fulfil an important prediction, which had foretold that He should so come. I then stated that that prophecy headed a series, which, for minuteness of detail, in almost every incident which occurred during the period of our Lord's trial, condemnation, and crucifixion, might well be deemed a narrative of events after they had happened, rather than a prediction of what should hereafter occur. It has often struck me, to how little purpose these priests and elders, and scribes and Pharisees, must have read their own Scriptures; how little conscious they were, that in every act of cruelty or malice, of insult or of taunt, which they heaped on Jesus, they were fulfilling each prediction as it arose, with an accuracy which, one would have thought, must at last have startled their own minds with the resemblance. But the veil was indeed upon their hearts; they knew

their Scriptures perfectly—by rote: they read them continually, but never read them aright; they used the very words which God, by His Holy Spirit, a thousand years before, had declared they should use; the very gestures He had assigned to them, they adopt; and yet, oh, blind infatuation! it never once occurred to them that they were but instruments in the hands of God to fulfil all that His prophets had spoken! They might have said, "Our lips are our own," and no doubt exulted in the thought that they were quoting Scripture to condemn Jesus, and not themselves; and yet those lips could only utter what He who formed them had declared they should utter. And as they passed beside the cross on which Jesus hung, and saw, as they believed, their victim powerless to save Himself or others, their hearts, no doubt, swelled with triumph, as if they had won the victory, and all had happened as they intended, and not as God foretold. It was, indeed, a blind infatuation; but even the very infatuation had been foretold, and "well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet, unto their fathers, The heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." But is this infatuation of this people no warning to ourselves? They read their Scriptures;

but they read to no purpose; and may not we be chargeable with reading our Bibles, and not applying their truths? Many a one hears God's solemn truths delivered, and is, perhaps, struck with their extreme suitableness to his neighbour's case: he may hear his own character sketched or filled up in the preacher's discourse, and may go home and express his wonder how such and such a neighbour can by any possibility of self-delusion evade its application to himself. Alas! the veil is upon our hearts too, till the Spirit of God takes of the things of Jesus, and shows them unto us. We shall read to as little purpose as these priests and elders, till the eyes of our understanding are opened, and shall hear with as little benefit, unless a power beyond that of prophet or preacher shall say to us, "Thou art the man."

It was, perhaps, more painful to the tender heart of Jesus to receive the cruel taunts and insults of His Jewish torturers, than those of the Roman soldiery: they were His countrymen; He had gone amongst them doing good continually; to them especially had His mission been confined, as to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and for them had His eyes filled with tears, as but a few days before he had recounted the desolations of Jerusalem. The cruelties of the Roman soldiery were indeed painful, but not a sigh, not a complaint, not a word, escapes his lips: as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened He not His mouth. And thus these soldiers in their

ignorance, as the priests in their malice, were alike unconscious agents in the overruling hand of God; and "those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath fulfilled," even while, and by the very means, they thought they were working their own ends and purposes. Little did these heathen persecutors think that by the very act they were thus helping to accomplish, they were breaking down the partition-wall that kept out the Gentile world from the covenanted mercies of God; and that from that cross which they were so eager to rear, that voice of mercy should issue forth, "Look unto Me, all the ends of the earth, and be ye saved." It has been well said, "Man proposes, but God disposes;" and blessed be His name for that truth!

SECTION LXXXVII.

(Chapter xxvii. verses 45—54.)

We read in the Gospel of St. Luke of the miraculous events that attended the birth of Jesus; how the glory of the Lord, in all its resplendent brightness, shone round about the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem, and how a star, or luminous appearance, of peculiar brilliance, gave notice to the wise men of the birth of Him that was born King of the Jews. And it was most fitting that the advent of Jesus should

be heralded with such glorious light, for "He was the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." But now that Light was to be for a season quenched; and the fitting emblem of that deed of guilt which was enacted on Calvary was that miraculous darkness which overspread the land for the space of three hours. Whether that darkness of three hours was like the Egyptian darkness of three days, "in which they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place," I cannot say. It was assuredly preternatural, arising from no passing storm, no eclipse of the sun, but a deep, lurid gloom settling over the whole land, while that awful conflict with the powers of darkness was taking place: not a single event is recorded to have occurred during those three eventful hours, nor a single word to have passed the lips of Jesus, till, towards its close, He gave utterance to that cry of deep and bitter agony, "My God, my God, why hast *Thou* forsaken me?" The words,we know, are taken from the 22nd Psalm, that most extraordinary accumulation of minute prophecy of almost every incident of the crucifixion; and it is a striking testimony to the value of Scripture, that the Son of God Himself, in His darkest sorrow, turned rather to the recorded words of the Psalmist, than to any of His own, for His communings with His Father. And how many a dying one of Christ's, since, has found David's Psalms, and David's words, the most consolatory to his own spirit, as he, too,

was about to tread the dark valley of the shadow of death! We may well ask, Did ever human sorrow, human bereavement, human suffering, utter such a cry as this? Never! for God never forsakes, never leaves His own. Nay, not even human guilt could utter such a cry, for if it did come forth from the deep abysses of a sinner's heart, it would at once testify that God had not forsaken, and that His Spirit was still striving with that sinner; but it *was* true of Jesus, and of Him only, since the world began. It was for our sin that He was now treading the winepress of God's fierce wrath alone: without sin Himself, He bare the sins of the whole world, and was suffering the just for the unjust. We must not, we dare not, uplift the veil that hides this conflict from human eye; but we cannot doubt that during those three hours of darkness, Jesus was assaulted by the whole artillery of the powers of hell; that Satan himself, the tempter and accuser of the brethren, laid before Him, in all its enormity, the accumulated sin of the world, from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Gethsemane,—a Law broken and shattered in every particle—a Love despised and slighted in every offer—a Justice violated in every precept. And who could tell so truly, who could feel so deeply, what sin was, as He who was suffering an accursed death for sin? Who could so well understand His Father's holy abhorrence, as He who knew that there was no other way by which God could justify the sinner without impeaching

His own justice, save by giving up His only begotten Son to death, and who, at that very moment, was mourning His Father's withdrawal from Him by reason of that sin? Thus God, for that season of darkness, had forsaken Him, had left Him alone. He was to pay our debt to its uttermost farthing; He was to endure in His own person, in that very nature that sinned, the whole that was due to sin; and if one ray of heavenly comfort had beamed upon His soul, if one impulse of God's Holy Spirit, to strengthen or console, had been vouchsafed, He would not have drained to its last and bitterest drop the cup of God's fury. We may now form some idea of what sin really is, which required such a sacrifice, and wrung such a cry from that uncomplaining Sufferer. We may too, however inadequately, have some conception of the priceless value of "that blood which cleanseth from *all* sin," and of the debt we owe to Jesus in all that it cost Him to ransom and redeem our souls. It is a saddening thought, as one reads and comments on these details of the Saviour's agony, that those who fall away from Him, even now, "crucify Him afresh." The scene on Calvary is re-opened, the betrayal of Judas is repeated, the denial of Peter, the desertion of all, is renewed; and not only in the high priest's palace, and the soldier's guard-house, and on the cross, is He met with taunt and insult, but in every act of sin He is again "put to an open shame."

SECTION LXXXVIII.

(Chapter xxvii. verse 54 to the end.)

We have now come to the close of that awful scene of suffering on Calvary. Jesus has yielded up the ghost—He has dismissed His spirit; but the lifeless body still hangs upon the cross, and, for aught His heathen executioners cared, it might still remain there,—for the Romans often left the bodies of those that had been crucified to be devoured by birds and beasts of prey. But this could not be so with Jesus—and why? Because God, by the mouth of His prophet, had declared that He should make His grave with the rich; that though numbered with the transgressors, and dying the death of a malefactor, yet His grave should be the grave of the honourable and the rich—a prediction so contradictory, and so unlikely ever to be fulfilled, that incredulity might almost have been forgiven. It was like those contradictory prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel respecting the King of Judah, and his captivity in Babylon, which led that monarch equally to disbelieve both; and yet both were accurately fulfilled. The one prophet had declared that Zedekiah should be carried captive to Babylon, while the other had as distinctly prophesied that he should never see Babylon: and they were both true to the very letter. He was carried captive to Babylon, but he never saw it; for his eyes were put out by his cruel conqueror. And so here we may say, "Hath the

Lord spoken, and shall He not make it good?" Shall any word that the Lord hath uttered fall to the ground, and not "accomplish that whereunto He sends it"? Jesus was to be numbered with the transgressors, and not only was a robber and a murderer preferred before Him, but He died the death of a criminal and a slave, and with two malefactors by His side.

It was at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, at three o'clock in the afternoon, that Jesus was to expire upon the cross; and yet before that evening closed, which it did at six, when the Sabbath commenced, Jesus was to be removed from that cross of shame, and laid in his honoured grave. That the body should be removed from the cross was no difficulty, for the priests themselves were anxious that it should not remain there on the Sabbath-day, and their law forbade a body to "remain all night upon the tree." But where was the rich man to be found? where was the tomb to be prepared in the brief space of scarcely more than two hours? and yet it must be so, or God's word would be unfulfilled. The disciples—to say nothing of their terror and dispersion—had probably never known, assuredly had never applied, the prophecy to Jesus; and if they had, had no means in their deep poverty to realize it. Jesus Himself had no home when living, and no grave now that He was dead. At this very crisis—and often has it been said (and how often has it been true!) that "man's extremity is God's opportunity"—at this very crisis,

nay, "when the even was come," and the Sabbath on the eve of commencement, the rich man whom God had foretold, whom God had foreseen and provided, steps forward, and begs permission of Pilate to take down the body from the cross, and give it honourable burial. But where is the grave? God had provided that also; and as the affectionate Mary, when she brake the box of precious ointment on the head of Jesus, unconsciously did it for his burial, so did Joseph, when causing to be hewn out of the rock a tomb for his own body, as unconsciously, but as surely, prepare it for the burial of Jesus. And thus to the very letter was fulfilled God's word, that, though "numbered with transgressors," He should yet "make His grave with the rich." It is said here that Joseph was himself a disciple of Jesus, though it was secretly, like Nicodemus, for fear of the Jews. He had never companied with Jesus, nor His disciples; his name is never mentioned in any Gospel, till the occurrences of this day brought him thus publicly into notice; and we find that not only was he rich, but honourable in station, as a member of the Sanhedrim, and in that capacity had not consented unto the deed of his colleagues. How striking the coincidence, that of all who loved and followed Jesus, the two who should come thus boldly forward to this work of peril and obloquy, should be the very two who, through timidity and cowardice, had shrunk from avowing Jesus as their Master during His lifetime, when His name was at least

an honoured name among the many, and His miracles and teaching had been proclaimed in admiring wonder through all the land; and yet, now, in His death of shame, these are the two, the only two, who acknowledge Him dead, whom they feared to own when living, while those who had been His friends and followers had all forsaken Him and fled! Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus would have been the two last whom human sagacity or human sorrow would have looked to in that moment of emergency. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord;" and we may as gratefully, as triumphantly, exclaim, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

SECTION LXXXIX.

(Chapter xxviii. verses 1—11.)

In the 110th Psalm, which is so undoubtedly declaratory of the exaltation and triumph of Christ, it is said in the last verse, "He shall drink of the brook in the way: *therefore* shall He lift up the head;" that is, in His way to glory He should drink deep of the waters of affliction and bitterness: the cross, with its shame and suffering, like a turbid brook in the way, should meet Him on His road—the cup of His Father's wrath was to be drained to the uttermost; and having bowed His head to drink,

having on that cross "bowed His head, and given up the ghost," *therefore* shall He lift up that head; on that very account, because He hath finished the work which the Father had given Him to do, *therefore* He should arise triumphant from the grave, and "lead captivity captive." As the apostle expresses the same truth, "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross: *wherefore* God also hath highly exalted Him." "It was not possible," says St. Peter, commenting on the resurrection of Jesus, "it was not possible for Him to be holden of death." It was but in vain that the chief priests and elders had sealed the door of the tomb with the signet-ring of Pilate, lest any should break in; it was to no purpose that Roman soldiers surrounded the tomb, till the dreaded third day was passed; vain, too, the very rock which inclosed the body of Jesus, and the "great stone" which blocked up the entrance of the grave. A solitary angel from heaven descended, and with a mighty earthquake rent the rock, rolled back the stone from the door of the tomb, and took his seat upon it, and Jesus came forth, the First-fruits of the grave, the First-begotten of the dead. It is true that Jesus was not the actual first that returned from death unto life. In the Old Testament there are instances of "women who received their dead raised to life again." Jesus Himself had recalled three from death unto life; and St. Matthew records that, in that convulsion of nature which attended the

crucifixion, the very graves were rent asunder, and many bodies of the saints, which slept, arose. But still Jesus was pre-eminently and alone the First-fruits of His own glorious victory: they arose at another's bidding, and by another's power; He at His own, and by His own right arm: they arose to return again to decay, He dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over Him. They arose to give the glorious assurance, that, though death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned, yet, when that "last enemy" shall have exhausted all his power, when his last victim has been laid low, and "death itself," and "all things," are put under the Conqueror's feet, then shall all those who entered their graves before the coming of Jesus in the flesh, be alike partakers with the later, and the latest, dead in the glorious resurrection of their risen Lord, "Christ, the First-fruits, afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming."

But we at least are not likely to dispute or doubt the point. The grateful language of our hearts, I trust, is that of Peter, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." And what is this "lively hope" which the apostle sets before us? "An inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." But let us not forget what he adds, "Reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of

God through faith unto salvation." Here is the great secret of the saint's strength and standing, —"kept by the power of God;" and that power sought and attained through the continual exercise of a living faith. I would say then to you, and to my own soul, Look to a crucified Saviour. He died for our sins: it was on that cross on Calvary that the conflict with the powers of darkness was fought; it was there He travailed, there He was sore oppressed and heavy-laden; there He poured out his soul unto death, and apparently retired from the contest a defeated and prostrate victim. But look a few hours onward, and that same Jesus who, being "delivered by the determinat counsel and foreknowledge of God, was taken, and by wicked hands was crucified and slain; Him God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be holden of them." The prayer of our Church, in her baptismal service, beautifully and emphatically combines both events in the admission of her young ones into Christ's fold, that, "as they are made partakers of the death of Jesus, so they may be partakers of His resurrection also;" and, with parental fidelity, before she dismisses the sponsors from her presence, reminds them of our mutual profession, "which is to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto Him; that, as He died and rose again for us, so should we, who are baptized, die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness; continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt

affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living."

SECTION XC.

(Chapter xxviii. verse 11 to the end.)

THE narrative of events after the resurrection of our Lord is very much shortened in St. Matthew's Gospel. He mentions none of the interviews which Jesus had with His disciples, except the one on the morning of the resurrection, with the women, as they were hastening to tell the disciples of what they had just witnessed at the tomb; and the one immediately preceding His ascension into heaven, in Galilee. St. Matthew, however, is the only one who mentions the story concocted by the chief priests with the soldiers to account for the absence of the body of Jesus from the grave; and as we shall not meet with it elsewhere, I will just devote a few moments to it. It is in itself too absurd to need refutation; but as the Spirit of God permitted and directed its being recorded, it is not to be altogether passed by without notice. It was very possibly a part of the plan of these chief priests and elders, or at least one would think it would naturally have suggested itself to their minds, that as the prediction of Jesus, that He should rise again on the third day, was so well known, and they had themselves unwittingly given currency to the rumour by making it the subject of a formal and official communication to

the Roman governor, and by the extraordinary precautions they had taken to prevent any fraud or imposition,—it would, I say, have been the natural suggestion of common policy, when the third day had passed, to have convened a meeting of their council and of the people at large at the grave of Jesus, and there have shown the body of their victim still lying lifeless, and already a prey to corruption. This would have put an end at once to their own fears and the disciples' hopes; and I can hardly doubt that such would have been their plan, had it not been so signally frustrated by Him who sitteth on high, and alike held them and their purposes "in derision." And so they invent and circulate this story—that the disciples came by night and stole away the body while the soldiers slept,—than which it were almost impossible for human folly to have invented, or human credulity to have believed, a more absurd and inconsistent one. No Roman soldier, any more than one in our own days, dared to sleep upon his post; and are we to imagine that a whole band of soldiers simultaneously gave themselves up to sleep, and alike neglected the duty they were placed there to fulfil? It is not, I will not say impossible, but it is the most improbable circumstance that ever occurred in military discipline. But be it true—grant that for once a whole picket of Roman soldiers on guard were so overcome by sleep, that, in spite of duty, and undeterred by the peril of the act, they yielded to the unconquerable impulse, and were fast asleep; were they then, under those

circumstances, and in that state of insensibility—were they credible witnesses of what occurred during their sleep? Could they swear to the persons who committed the act, or even to the act itself? The very tale is its own best refutation. And yet one is grateful that the Holy Spirit of God has condescended to leave the story upon record; for though it shows to what length human malice will go, it shows also that there is a limit beyond which human credulity will not proceed; for though St. Matthew writes, "This saying is commonly reported among the Jews unto this day," he does not add, "and is generally believed among them." It did not, it could not, impose on any one; and though these Roman soldiers consented for a bribe to uphold the tale, they no doubt disclosed to many the real circumstances of that morning of the resurrection, when even their bold hearts quailed at the earthquake, and the appearance of the angel from heaven. It is, too, a striking testimony to the impartiality of the Evangelist, and the truth of his narrative, that, in the very act of relating the miraculous circumstances attending the resurrection, he gives equal circulation to the story put forth by authority to impeach his own statement.

It is a precious promise with which Matthew closes his Gospel, sealing up, as it were, his portion of the sacred canon with one of the richest gems in the treasury of Jesus: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." It must have been to himself the sweetest solace,

the never-failing provision by the way, as he extended his own missionary labours into distant lands, and finally closed those labours by a martyr's death. There must have been days and hours when he was in solitude; many a weary league, perhaps, which he travelled alone; and, as his Master had cheered His own spirit by the reflection, "And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me," so His apostle might, in every moment of weariness and peril, in the day of trial and the night of death, uphold his own fainting steps and drooping spirit by that precious assurance, "Lo, I am with you alway." And may not the missionary now, whether, like Matthew, his field of labour be in far Africa and Ethiopia, or, with Thomas and Bartholomew, in the distant East, and the sun-burnt climes of India, may he not go forth on his labours of love with the same promise glowing in his heart, and guiding his pilgrim steps? Yes! Jesus saith to him, as He said to Matthew and his companions; as He has said to every labourer in every clime and in every age; and as He will continue to say to each one, as he goes forth to his labour, as long as there is seed to sow and a harvest to reap, "Lo, I am with you alway, *even unto the end of the world!*"

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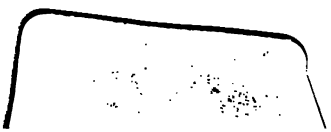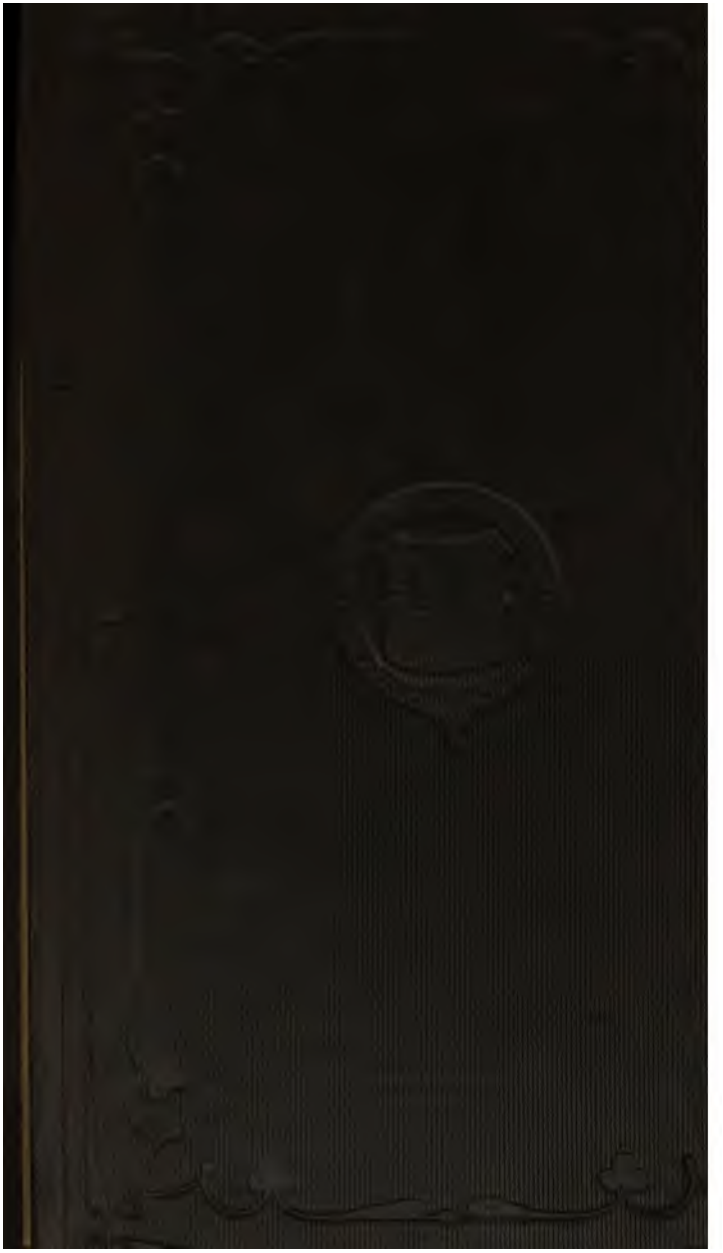
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